

Young Klondike

STORIES OF A GOLD SEEKER.

Issued Semi-Monthly—By Subscription \$1.25 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York, N. Y., Post Office, March 15, 1898, by Frank Tousey.

No. 3.

NEW YORK, April 13, 1898.

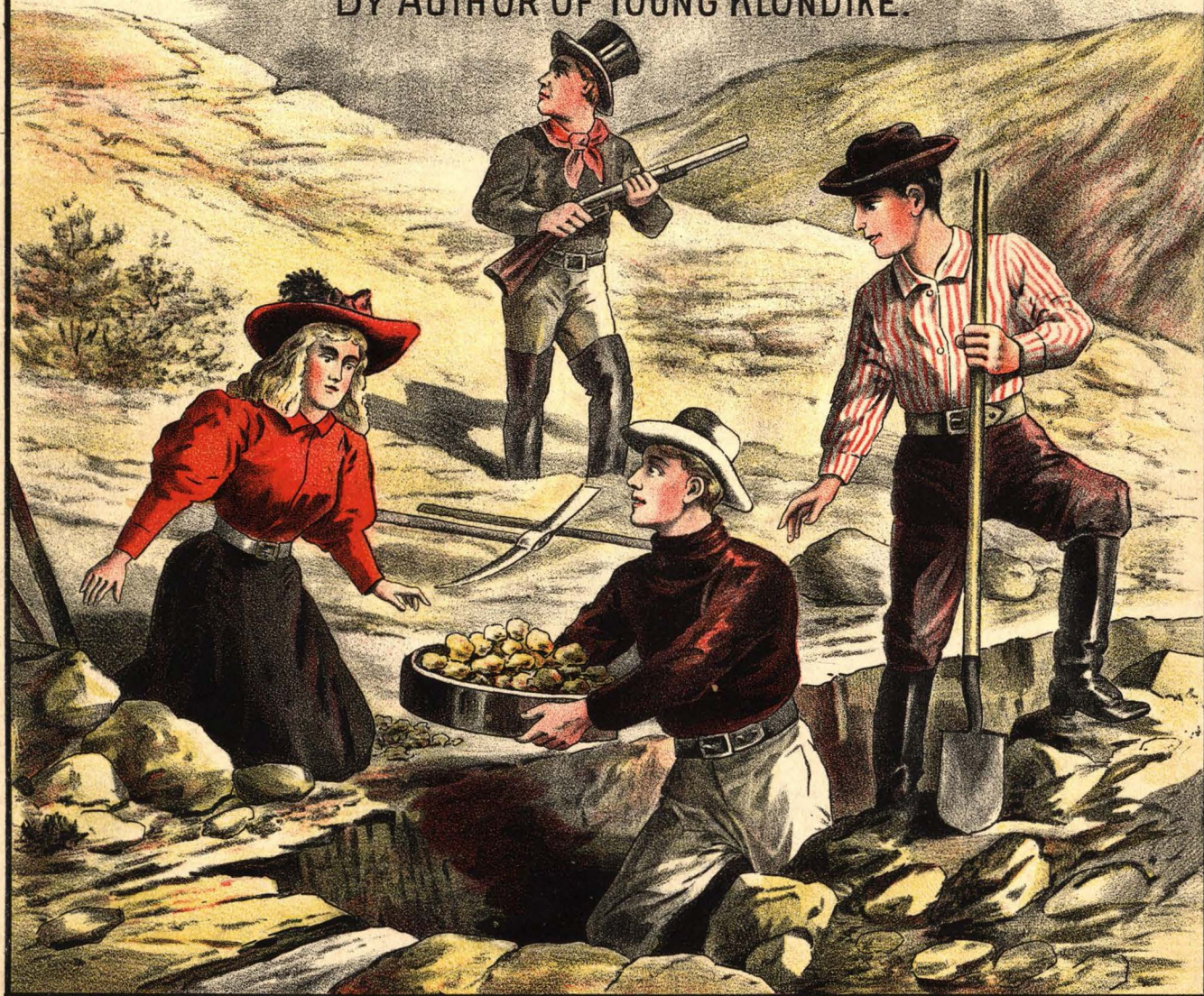
Price 5 Cents.

YOUNG KLONDIKE'S FIRST MILLION;

—OR—

HIS GREAT STRIKE ON ELDORADO CREEK.

BY AUTHOR OF "YOUNG KLONDIKE."



But fortune had favored Young Klondike now and no mistake. In a few moments the pan was filled to the brim with nuggets. Ned was handing it up out of the hole to Edith when the Unknown, looking off toward the hills, suddenly shouted: "Who goes there!"

YOUNG KLONDIKE.

➤ Stories of a Gold Seeker. ➤

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YOUNG KLONDIKE'S FIRST MILLION;

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His Great Strike on El Dorado Creek.

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CHAPTER I.

THE VOICE IN THE STORM.

"HEY, Ned! Ned!"

The voice rang out hoarsely, coming from deep down in the ground.

Ned Golden, better known to his friends as Young Klondike, leaned over the windlass at the mouth of the mining shaft, and shouted back:

"Hello, Dick!"

Again came the reply in that same hoarse, muffled way:

"There ain't a show of gold here in the drift, and I think you'd better come down."

"All right."

"Come now!"

"Yes; just as soon as I let Edith know."

"Bring the big reflecting lantern with you. Can't see much with this old thing."

Ned Golden hurried out of the shaft house and started up the bank of the little creek which went tumbling over the rocks, to empty itself into the Klondike river, a few hundred yards away.

The mention of Klondike suggests gold seekers, Alaska, frozen streams and snow covered mountains, and all that sort of thing.

The suggestion is quite correct, except that this was a day in the early part of June, and instead of ice and snow the creeks and river were sending their water down to join the mighty Yukon with a rush.

The high mountains surrounding "Weltonville," as this camp on Klondike Claim 172 was called, were still snow-covered at their peaks, but below the snow-line the dark growth of hemlocks and cedars was beginning to wear a greener look.

It was only four o'clock in the morning, and already broad daylight. Close at hand was the Klondike

country's longest day, when the sun would touch the horizon only to rise again, whereas in December just the reverse is the case—then the sun scarcely rises at all.

Ned Golden walked hurriedly toward a little hut which stood on the bank of the creek.

Inside the open door, a stout woman, with her sleeves rolled up above the elbows, was busy mixing a batch of bread.

By her side stood a particularly pretty blonde girl of eighteen years, busy washing up the breakfast dishes.

"Hello, Ned! What's the matter? You look as though you had lost your last friend!" she called out as Young Klondike approached.

"And I feel so, Edith."

"What's the matter now?"

"It looks very much as though 172 had petered out."

"That's bad! But we've been expecting it."

"Dick says there ain't a trace of gold in drift No. 1."

"And Nos. 2 and 3 have already petered out."

"That's what's the matter. I want to go down the shaft and have a look; will you come and tend the windlass a little while?"

"Certainly, I will, Ned. Mrs. Colvin, I suppose you can do these dishes alone?"

"Business first and dishes afterward," replied the fat woman, cheerfully.

Ned took down a large reflecting lantern from its hanging place on a hook against the wall.

Then he and Edith went back to the shaft.

"Never mind, Ned," said the girl, as they walked along. "My claim ain't touched yet—neither is Dick's. Perhaps we'll have better luck on those."

"I don't know," said Ned. "Drift No. 1 runs to-

ward Dick's, and yours is below that. The prospect is not promising, Edith."

"All the same we've taken big money out of 172, Ned. You know that. How much have we in hand at the present time?"

"Over seventy-five thousand dollars in dust and nuggets."

"And we were robbed of over eighty thousand dollars by that scoundrel, Jerry Tolman. Shall I ever forget the day we chased down over the frozen river?"

"Probably not, Edith. I'm sure I never shall. Yes, that explosion at Barney McGraw's sent Jerry and his pals down under the ice, and even their bodies were never seen again, and our gold went with them, worse luck."

"What I argue is, Ned, that a claim which has paid one hundred and sixty thousand dollars ought to be worth something. If we don't want to work it ourselves, we can sell out and try our luck somewhere else."

"You're a good business woman, Edith, and your advice shall have every consideration; but here we are at the mine. Dick! Hello, Dick!"

"Hello!" came the reply, out of the hole.

Dick Luckey was Ned Golden's partner. He was standing at the bottom of the shaft.

"Thought you were never coming!" he called out.

"We've taken our time," said Ned, "but it's early yet."

He hurried down the ladder and joined Dick at the bottom of the shaft.

Opening off into the earth were three tunnels of different lengths.

These were the "drifts."

They were openings about as high as the heads of the two boy miners, and just wide enough for them to work freely in.

They ran along over the bed rock through the gravel.

It is on top of the bed rock that the greatest deposit of gold is found on the Klondike.

The firm of "Golden & Luckey," as the boys styled themselves, had been working these drifts since the previous December with good success, until about a week before our story opens.

At that time all trace of gold suddenly seemed to vanish from two of the drifts.

Dick had begun exploring the gravel at the end of the third on this particular morning, and was able to report the same unsatisfactory result.

Ned lighted the lantern, and they went into the drift.

He flashed the light about, but could see no trace of gold.

"This looks bad, Dick," he said. "Still, we can't judge until we've worked out a few pans of dirt."

"There certainly are no nuggets here."

"You're right; let Edith hoist up a little. I'll break in a bit further."

Ned seized a pick ax and went to work.

He handled the pick like "an old hand at the bel-lows."

Great clods of earth and gravel came tumbling out of the wall at his feet.

Dick shoveled up the dirt into a wheelbarrow.

Wheeling it to the mouth of the drift, he loaded it into a tub which hung suspended from a rope.

The other end of the rope was attached to a windlass in place over the mouth of the shaft.

Edith wound up the tub and dumped its contents into a trough without any apparent exertion.

Few girls of her age could exhibit such strength.

Six tubsful in all were thus raised and dumped.

"The rocker is full," Edith called, then. "I can't handle any more."

Ned and Dick then came up out of the shaft.

The water was turned into the rocker—it came from an elevated wooden trough connecting with the creek.

The rocker was then violently agitated by Ned and Dick.

Edith watched its contents earnestly.

If there was gold dust or nuggets mixed with the earth, these would settle to the bottom of the rocker, and the sieve at its mouth would aid to prevent their escape.

At last all the earth had been dissolved and passed away with the water through the sieve.

The boys then picked out the coarse gravel by hand.

Mixed with it were a few flakes of shining gold.

But this instead of encouraging these young miners seemed to have just the opposite effect.

"Oh, pshaw!" cried Edith.

"Pretty well played out," said Dick.

"I should say there was about a dollar and a half in all that," remarked Ned, with a long face.

Many a time a hundred dollars and over had been taken out of the rocker after such a working as this.

To have ten—twenty or even fifty dollars a month or two before would have been considered an everyday affair.

"It's petering out—there's no use talking, it's petering out," said Dick. "I wish the Unknown was here with the boat. I'd be tempted to pull up stakes right now."

"We won't do anything hastily, if you take my advice," said Edith.

"Which we certainly shall," declared Ned.

"At least we'll wait for the Unknown," said Dick.

"Of course! Wouldn't think of deserting Weltonville without him; but we'll try another lot before we give up for the day."

They tried several others.

All panned out in the same unsatisfactory way.

After dinner they gave it up, and taking their rifles went out hunting.

Edith Welton was a splendid shot.

The girl had been brought up in California, and had had lots of practice shooting on the tule lands in the Suisun Valley.

Expecting to meet her father on the Klondike, she had started alone for Dawson City the previous fall, the steamer in which she took passage being wrecked on the voyage to Juneau.

It was at this time that Ned Golden and Dick Luckey fell in with her.

Ned and Dick were New York boys, and were on their way from Seattle to the Klondike at the time of the wreck.

It was their fortune to save Edith from the sinking steamer, and she accompanied them to Dawson City, where she found that her father had gone to South Africa.

Friendless and alone, Edith joined her fortunes with Young Klondike and Dick, and with good Mrs. Colvin as a companion, accompanied them to the claims they had purchased, and, with the exception of an occasional visit to Dawson City, they had been here ever since.

Hunting was good that afternoon.

Edith brought down as many as twenty ducks, and Ned and Dick did their share.

These were shot on the Klondike; great flocks of them were constantly flying over the river, and were brought ashore by Edith's big Newfoundland dog Rover.

During the long winter Rover had been left in Dawson City, but Ned brought him up when spring opened, and he was now an important member of the little colony at Weltonville.

That the camp had been named for Edith need scarcely be said.

Mrs. Colvin roasted a pair of ducks for supper, and the four sat long at the table discussing their affairs.

During their conversation frequent allusions were made to the Unknown.

The reader will make the acquaintance of this person later.

And, indeed, he seemed to be a very important person, for it was the Unknown says this, and the Unknown says that.

In fact, his name—if it can be called a name—was constantly on their lips.

After supper—it was still broad daylight—Ned went down to the shaft house to gather up their tools.

This was something which was done every night, for there was always danger of an attack by roving bands of the Coppermine Indians.

Once the little camp had been burned by these rascals, and all feared the same disaster might occur again.

Soon Ned was back again, announcing that it was going to rain.

Now rain in Alaska in the month of June is apt to be a somewhat serious matter.

The winters there are long and cold, and the summers correspondingly short and wet.

It is then rain, rain all the time and six times out of eight the storms are so long and heavy that work is next to impossible.

"That will pen us up another day," said Dick, dole-

fully. "Confound it! I meant to do a little prospecting further up the creek to-morrow; I do hope it will be a clear day."

But it wasn't.

The rain began shortly after midnight.

From that until noon next day it poured in torrents.

Then after a brief lull it began again and toward dark—that meant eleven o'clock at night—it was pouring harder than ever.

The Klondike river had now risen almost to the top of the bluffs, and was rushing on toward the Yukon with fearful rapidity.

Even the little creek on which the camp was located, felt the force of the storm.

The water was almost up to the level of the shaft house, and a slight rise further would surely bring it into the hut.

Ned came in at a quarter-past eleven, feeling pretty blue.

"No use talking. We're in great danger," he declared.

"Do you think there's any chance of the hut being washed away?" asked Edith.

"It certainly looks like it. The shaft will begin to fill inside of twenty minutes."

"That will end our chances of work for a week," grumbled Dick.

"It will end our chances until we can bail her out, but what's the use of working where there's no gold?"

"Let's go out and see," said Edith.

"No, no!" declared Ned. "You go to bed, Edith. Dick and I will bunk in the shaft house and stay on the watch. Anyway, we ought to do it, for it's more than likely that the Unknown will show up during the night."

Edith soon retired, and the boys went out to the shaft house where there were two bunks, built against the wall.

Dick yielded to his partner's urgent advice and turned in.

Ned took his seat at the open door facing the creek, and with his rifle laying across his knees, remained there silently watching for more than half an hour.

It was dark now, but it would soon be light again.

Ned knew that he only had a short time to wait before the first gray of dawn would appear.

The creek was now almost on a level with the rude frame structure.

It went sweeping on to join the Klondike with a force which threatened to demolish it at any instant.

Suddenly Ned heard Rover's bark behind him.

He was startled for the moment, for he thought he had left the dog asleep in the hut.

But there was Rover out on the bank with his paws in the water, barking furiously.

"What in thunder is the matter with the dog?" cried Dick, springing up from the bunk.

"Don't know," said Ned, peering out into the storm.

"He sees something."

"Evidently."

"Great Scott, Ned! How high the water is!"

"Not so high as I thought it would be, Dick. I looked for it in the shaft house by this time."

"'Tain't far from it."

"'Tain't in though—that's something."

"It's a lot if it will only stay out. Gee, how it does pour!"

"What in the world does the dog see?"

"Give it up. I can't see a thing, and—hark! Wasn't that a cry?"

Far in the distance, over the bluff from the Klondike, a voice was heard rising above the storm.

"Save me! I'm drowning! Save me! Help! Help! Help!"

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN IN THE KLONDIKE.

"Bow! Wow! Wow! Bow! Wow! Wow!" Rover was barking louder than ever.

"But the strange part of it was, he barked up the creek, which was in the opposite direction from the cry.

"By gracious, there's a man over there on the Klondike!" cried Ned.

"The Unknown!" gasped Dick.

"No, no! Never! It ain't his voice!"

"Tell you it must be! The storm changes its sound. Get the rope, quick! Quick!"

"I'm getting it as fast as I can. There goes the dog!"

Suddenly Rover made a spring right into the creek. He paddled off against the current.

"Rover! Rover! Good dog! Go for him!" Edith's voice was heard calling.

There was Edith herself running out of the hut, rifle in hand.

"Edith! Edith!" shouted Ned. "This is the way! The dog is wrong!"

"No, no! Rover is never wrong!" cried Edith.

She ran off up the bank of the creek, Rover breasting the strong current the best he could, and barking furiously all the while.

There was no time to argue.

Ned and Dick were already out of the hut and ready to act.

Again the cry for help had made itself heard above the storm, but it was perfectly evident that it did not come from the direction which Edith Welton and the dog had taken.

Usually, Edith was as sharp as steel in an emergency like this, but she had trusted to the instincts of her dog, and in so doing, had been deceived; how, will be made clear later on.

But Ned and Dick knew that the cry must come from the Klondike.

With all possible speed they ran in that direction.

The ground over which they hurried was already covered with water.

Regardless of wet feet they went splashing through

it, and rushed up to the top of the bluff which formed the river bank.

Here the water was not four feet below them, and this was a good eight feet above its usual height.

"Hello! Hello!" shouted Dick.

"Hello!" came the voice out of the darkness.

"Where are you?"

"Here in the water—holding on to my canoe. Throw me a line, for Heaven's sake, my strength is almost gone."

"I see him," cried Ned. "Thank Heaven for that light!"

The man in the Klondike must surely have perished, if at that moment the edge of the sun had not been lifted above the horizon.

Of course the boys could not see it, but it made it lighter, and that light showed them a dark figure in the rushing river not twenty feet away.

An overturned birch-bark canoe; a man clinging with one hand to it, while with the other he kept clutching at the bushes which lined the shore, which would break almost as he got hold of them, but even this served to check his progress.

But for the bushes he would have been swept away before the boys reached the bluff, and beyond Weltonville there was not another mining camp for miles and miles.

"Look out for the line!" shouted Ned.

He had coiled up the rope as he ran, and was all ready to throw it.

Swinging it round his head like a lasso, he let fly with all the skill of a cowboy.

The man in the Klondike saw it coming and was all ready.

He flung up his hand and deftly caught the rope as it descended.

"Bless you for that, partner!" he panted. "Now, then, haul in!"

He had succeeded in tying the rope under his arms.

The canoe, of which he let go, of course, went flying down the stream.

Ned and Dick pulled on the rope, but it was scarcely necessary, for the current had already swept the drowning man toward them.

"Get it round a tree!" yelled the man in the Klondike. "Hold hard, boys! I can climb up as I am."

Ned threw the end of the rope around the trunk of a stunted cedar and wound it tight.

The man then began pulling himself up hand over hand.

He seemed weak and almost exhausted.

Half way up he suddenly dropped back into the water, going head under with a loud splash.

"No use, boys! Can't be done!" he cried, as he came to the surface.

"Keep cool! We'll pull you in!" shouted Ned.

"Cool! Burning blue blazes! How can I help keeping cool? This yere water is only a couple of degrees above freezo! Pull me in! Pull me in, or I shall die!"

Ned and Dick pulled with a will and soon had the poor wretch up on a level with the bank.

He clutched at it desperately and managed to pull himself up upon it.

Here he fell down all in a heap and lay there, never speaking a word.

"We must get him to the hut, Dick, or he's a goner!" cried Ned.

"That's what!" echoed Dick. "By gracious, I don't like his looks, though!"

Evidently this unknown was not *the* Unknown.

This was something the boys recognized at a glance.

He was a big man, with long hair and frowsy beard.

His head was bare, and his feet might as well have been in the same condition, for he wore no shoes—nothing but old rags wrapped round the feet up to the ankles.

His clothes were mere rags, too, and all being thoroughly water soaked, did not improve his general appearance.

In short, the new-comer was a hard case—the boys saw this as soon as he came up on the bank.

It was easier to say get him up than to do it.

The man was a big, powerful fellow, and probably did not weigh far short of two hundred pounds.

"I can't lift one side of him!" gasped Dick, giving it up.

"He can't lie here in the rain, then!" cried Ned. "Gracious, how that dog does bark! Ah! There goes Edith! There was something up the creek after all."

A shot suddenly rang out through the storm.

Then there was another and another.

"Heigho! Ned! Dick! I've got him!" called Edith.

"So have we!" cried Ned, "and what we are going to do with him I don't know."

But right here the man relieved them by opening his eyes and staggering to his feet of his own accord.

"Bless you for this, partner. You've saved my life and I don't never forget it, but get me inside somewhere, or I shall die on your hands."

"Can you walk?" asked Ned.

"Yes, yes! I think so if it ain't far! What's the firing? There hain't no Injuns about, be there?"

"No, no! It's all right! Come on!"

As they led him to the hut, Edith called again:

"This way, Ned! This way! I tell you I've got him, but we shall lose him if you don't come with the rope!"

"Get him inside and into my bunk, Dick," said Ned.

"I must go up the creek and see what Edith wants."

They were at the door of the hut now, and leaving the stranger with Dick, Ned ran on with the rope.

He soon saw what he was wanted for—it was light enough to see anything now.

Edith stood on the bank of the creek watching Rover who was in the water, barking wildly, and circling round a huge bear which had evidently been badly

wounded, and was doing his best to battle with the dog and the stream.

"Finish him, Edith! Put another ball into him!" shouted Ned.

"I've put four into him already, and I haven't got another shot in my rifle!" cried Edith. "Lasso him if you can, Ned! He's bit Rover twice and I'm afraid he'll kill him next."

Ned hastily made a noose and flung the rope as bear and dog came sweeping toward him down the creek.

His aim was true, and the rope fell over the bear's big head.

Ned pulled taut, having thrown the other end of the rope around a tree.

"That settles him!" he shouted. "Run to the shaft house, Edith, and get my rifle!"

"If you had come when I first called you, we could have had him fixed by this time, Ned. What were you and Dick about down there?"

"Rescuing a drowning man."

"What! What!"

"Oh, yes, it's just as I tell you—he's in the hut now."

"Not the Unknown?"

"Not our Unknown, but he is an unknown all the same, for, I don't know his name."

"No more we do our Unknown's! Hold hard, Ned, I'll be back in no time."

She ran past Ned and made for the shaft house.

But the bear had given up the ghost before she returned, and Rover was barking furiously on the shore.

It was all that Ned and Edith could do to pull him in.

"There's all the fresh meat we want for a while," declared Edith. "Now then, Ned, what about your tramp?"

"Well, he looks like a tramp, for a fact," laughed Ned, and he explained what had occurred.

"I wish he wasn't here," said Edith.

"Why do you say it?"

"We're enough for ourselves—one extra is a crowd."

"Of course we couldn't help it. Besides, if the rumor we heard that Claims 173, 174 and 175 have been taken up is true, we'll soon have all the crowd we want at Weltonville."

"Yes, and more, and that will be a good time to sell out and be on the move; something tells me I shall never work my claim."

Edith's claim was No. 170, and Dick's 171. No. 172 was Ned's, and on this alone had work been begun.

"We must get the bear up to the hut before he is washed away," declared Ned, "but first we had better take a look at the shaft house."

"Was the water in the shaft when you left?"

"No; but it was precious near it. Come on, Edith. Dick and I will attend to the bear. You mustn't stand out here in the rain."

"Don't mind the rain a bit," declared Edith. "I heard Rover barking, and came right out. I couldn't

imagine what was the reason you boys wouldn't come."

"Didn't you hear that man shouting?"

"No, I did not; if I had, I should have been with you, of course."

By this time they had reached the shaft house.

Ned gave an exclamation of disgust.

"Just as I feared—the water is running into the shaft!" he cried, "and there's no way to stop it—no way in the world!"

It was a fact; the creek had risen to the level of the shaft house, and the water was now pouring over the sill into the hole.

"It won't take long to fill up the drift, and the shaft, too," said Edith.

"It will fill before breakfast," declared Ned. "That ends our work for the present. Come, let's hurry back to the hut. We shall be lucky if that ain't washed away, too."

"And if it is, Ned?"

"Then we shall have to take to the hills till the water goes down—that's all."

It was a gloomy prospect, certainly.

But Ned and Edith had been through many trials since they started for the Klondike, and both had learned to take things as they came.

Dick met them at the door of the hut.

"He's dropped off asleep," he said; "he's a badly used up man, if I know anything. I hope he don't die on our hands."

The stranger lay covered up in the bunk.

Dick had hung his wet clothes to dry before the fire.

"I've given him all the blankets I could find," he declared, "but he said he was cold even then."

"Did you ask him his name?" inquired Ned.

"Yes; he said he would talk by-and-by. Fact is, his teeth chattered so he could scarcely speak."

"Poor wretch!" exclaimed Edith. "Well, we must make him as comfortable as we can until the storm is over."

But noon came, and there was no sign of the storm abating.

Matters were looking worse than ever.

The shaft and drifts were all full.

In fact the water was flowing in at one door of the shaft house and out by the other.

The hut which stood on higher ground had escaped as yet, but the prospect was very gloomy, for the water had risen almost up to the door sill.

"It surely can't go much higher," said Edith, "but if you say so, we'll pack up our things, Ned."

"It ain't time yet, Edith. We'll wait a bit."

"He's waking up," said Dick, pointing to the man in the bunk.

The stranger had stretched out an arm.

Then he turned over and groaned.

All at once he sat upright and burst into a wild laugh.

"Ha! Ha! Ha! I see the gold!" he cried. "It's flowing right up to the door! The world's full of it! Gold! Gold! Gold!"

Ned looked at him in amazement; Edith drew fearfully away.

For the situation was plain enough to both.

The man they had taken from the Klondike was mad!

CHAPTER III.

THE RUN DOWN THE RIVER ON THE ROOF.

"OFF his hooks, ain't he?" said Dick, touching his forehead as the stranger dropped back in the bunk and seemed to go right off to sleep.

"That's what," said Ned. "It's a bad business."

"We can do nothing about it," said Edith. "Look at his face. I believe he is starving."

"So do I," said Mrs. Colvin. "I'll fix him up a bowl of our canned soup. It will do him good."

Later they roused him up to drink it.

The poor wretch swallowed the soup eagerly.

He just took the bowl and drank it down like some famished animal.

When he had finished he handed back the bowl and began to rave again.

He did not seem to know where he was, nor to remember how he came in the hut.

Ned tried to quiet him.

Edith was so disturbed by it all, that she and Mrs. Colvin retired to their quarters in the loft.

"Oh, I do wish the Unknown would come," she said. "He'd tell us what to do."

"He'll never come till it stops raining, that's sure," said Ned; "don't you worry, Edith. I ain't a bit afraid of him. It will come all right."

In a few minutes the man quieted down again, and went off to sleep.

Ned and Dick proceeded to skin the bear in the little shed that was attached to the hut.

But they were driven out by the water before they could get the skin off.

"Thunder! This won't do!" cried Ned. "The water will be in the house next."

"We'd better pack up our duds, and make for the hills while we can," said Dick.

"I hate to do it, Dick."

"Better be sure than sorry."

"We'll take the gold up-stairs, anyhow."

"Yes, and that ought to have been done before."

The gold was buried under the hut.

Ned raised a board near the fireplace, and started to dig it up.

The water filled the hole in a moment, and the bags were pulled out all wet and muddy.

Ned called to Edith to open the trap door, and the bags were carried up into the loft.

While they were stowing them away, an awful thunderclap shook the hut.

"That's the break-up!" cried Ned.

Somebody else cried out at the same instant.

It was the madman down-stairs.

"Gold, gold, gold! It's raining gold!" he yelled.

There was a rush of rain at that moment; it beat upon the roof and rattled against the window panes.

"Let me out! I want to catch it!" yelled the madman. "It's my gold! I located it on El Dorado Creek! It comes out of the claim by the split cedar tree near the big white rock! Don't let it get away from me! Let me out! Let me out!"

The boys hurried down the ladder.

The madman sat up in the bunk, staring about.

"Boys, I can't get out," he whispered, mysteriously. "The devil's got hold of my heels, and he won't let me go—say, will you put out a pan to catch the gold?"

"Yes, yes," said Ned, soothingly. "Lie down and go to sleep. We'll attend to it."

"That's all right, then; say, my name is Cal Remington. I ain't no snoozer. I'm an honest man, if they did try to lynch me. Say, I didn't kill that feller—I swar I didn't. Tell 'em how 'twas, will yer, and mebbe they'll let up on me. I don't want to have to take to the mountains again. It's blame tough sleepin' thar on the snow without blankets and nothin' to eat for days and days."

It was horrible to listen to him.

Ned saw at once that Cal Remington must have been driven out of some mining camp by would-be lynchers.

Life in the mountains back of Klondike river was something terrible to contemplate.

If this man had been living so it was no wonder he had gone mad.

"Lie down. You're safe with us. We won't let them get you," said Ned. "Don't you worry. Have a good sleep and then we'll give you a bear steak that will brace you up."

"All right, boy, I trust you."

He lay down again and was off in a moment.

"By gracious, I don't like that for a cent," said Dick.

"We can't turn him out, though, whatever he may be. Heavens, how it does rain!"

"Worse than ever. What noise is that!"

"Sounds like a train of cars coming."

"Great Scott! It's something different from what has been!" cried Dick.

Thoroughly startled by the loud rushing sound which had suddenly made itself heard, Dick ran to the door and flung it open.

"We are lost!" he cried. "No time to save anything now."

"Get that man up the ladder!" shouted Ned. "Shut the door! Shut the door!"

It was a startling sight which met the gaze of the boys.

A great wall of water was rushing toward them with fearful speed.

Long afterward they knew that a small lake far up on the mountain side had overflowed its banks, the water rushing into the creek.

Ned shouted to Edith to open the scuttle, and look out, and then he and Dick seized Cal Remington, and dragged him out of the bunk.

Before they could do this, the water came into the hut and was as high as their knees.

"Don't drown me, boys! Don't drown me!" groaned the madman. "I didn't kill him—I swar I didn't!"

"Up the ladder! Up the ladder! There—we'll help you!" cried Ned.

They got him up somehow, and none too soon.

The water had risen to their armpits before they could get up into the loft. Cal Remington dropped on the floor and sank off to sleep again.

Edith was out on the flat roof, and Mrs. Colvin was trembling with fear.

"Ned Golden, are we all going to be drowned?" she asked; "because if we are I may as well pack up my things right now."

"But we ain't going to be drowned," cried Ned, "and lots of good it would do you to have your things packed up if we were. Take it easy, Mrs. Colvin—it will all come out right."

"Come up here, boys!" cried Edith from the roof. "We are going now!"

"Cool as a cucumber, same as ever," cried Ned, as he and Dick scrambled out on the roof.

"Can't very well help being cool up here," said Edith. "I don't see where all this water comes from, and—here we go!"

Suddenly the hut gave a violent lurch and went over sideways.

Edith would have fallen off if Ned had not thrown his arm about her.

In an instant the hut partially righted.

They could hear Mrs. Colvin screaming below in the loft as it sailed off toward the Klondike.

There was no trace of the shaft house now.

Ned declared that they passed right over it.

A moment later they were out on the Klondike, sailing majestically down the river toward Dawson City.

"Well, this is great," cried Edith. "Upon my word it beats everything how suddenly it all came about."

But Ned was in despair.

"It's all my fault," he groaned. "If I'd listened to you, Dick, we'd been safe in the hills now."

"Don't say a word, Ned," said Dick. "If our foresight was as good as our hind sight, none of us would make any blunders. Do you think we are in danger?"

"Of course we are in danger, but I think the hut will hold together for a while, and I don't believe it will sink."

"If we could get the stove and some of the heavy stuff out, it might help."

"I don't believe it could be done. I could stay under the water a couple of minutes, perhaps, but I don't believe it would be any use for me to try to get the stove down and out through the door."

"I suppose not," said Edith. "Come up here, Mrs. Colvin! You won't feel so scared when you can see your danger. Ned, help her up."

Mrs. Colvin quieted down when they got her on the roof.

In the excitement of the moment everyone forgot the poor wretch who lay sleeping on the floor of the loft.

Meanwhile, the hut was sailing swiftly down the Klondike.

It was really wonderful what good time they made. The banks seemed to fairly fly past them.

But the scene was one of indescribable loneliness.

High mountains towered on both sides, with long stretches on black forests extending from the base of the foothills to the water's edge.

Where the banks were low the forest was half under water, and even at points where they knew the bluffs to be comparatively high, the water was up almost on a level with the ground.

"Good-by to Weltonville!" cried Ned. "Well, never mind, Edith! We are sailing down the Klondike, but something tells me we are not sailing to our death."

CHAPTER IV.

THE GREAT UNKNOWN.

JUST about the time the hut was at its full headway down the Klondike, with its wretched inmates doing their best to hold their position on the roof, the little steamer Queen was working its way up the river, borne down almost to the water's edge by the crowd of miners on board.

The Alaskan spring had fairly opened, and the would-be Klondikers who had preferred wintering in Dawson City, were now crowding to the diggings.

This was the third voyage of the Queen since the river opened, and this time she was bound far up the Klondike, instead of turning into Bonanza Creek, as she had done both times before.

Among her passengers were men of every age, station, and previous condition, all bent on the same errand.

Some had bought claims and were going to work them, but by far the greater number had no idea whatever where they were going, or what they were to do when they reached their destination.

Among these hundreds were doomed to disappointment, and many would doubtless pay for their want of forethought with their lives.

Among those who crowded on deck was a short man with a shabby plug hat, now dripping with rain, jammed down on the back of his head.

He wore big cavalry boots and carried an army canteen slung at his side.

Some said the canteen was empty, and certainly he was never seen to take a pull at it.

Ever since the Queen left Dawson City this man had made himself very much at home on the steamer, sticking to the deck in spite of the weather, and talking to everybody.

He seemed to have traveled all over the world and made no secret of it, but the strange part of it all was that nobody seemed to know his name.

One said it was Smith and another swore it was Jones, while a third was equally positive that it was

Robinson, and each declared that he must be right for the man had told him so himself.

On one point they all agreed, and that was his business.

He was certainly a detective after some criminal.

Three times he had started in to arrest one of his fellow passengers.

Each time he stopped short and broke out with profuse apologies.

"You really must excuse me, my dear sir," was the way he put it. "I'm a trifle short-sighted. I took you for my man."

Thus everybody got to laughing over the fellow, and as they could not agree on his name, they dubbed him the great Unknown.

After the Queen had passed the mouth of Bonanza Creek the rain suddenly ceased, and many of those who had been below joined the dripping crowd on deck.

"Well, sir," remarked the Unknown, to a tall Klondiker, "this is a little more comfortable. If the sun will only condescend to come out and dry us off now, I think—ha—by the Jumping Jeremiah! There's my man now! See me put the bracelets on him!"

And away dashed the Unknown into the midst of the crowd.

But he put bracelets on nobody.

The tall Klondiker saw him address a wild looking individual, who stood near the rail on the starboard side.

"How do you do, sir. Where are you bound?" was all he said.

"Well, I'm sure I don't know," replied the Klondiker, "I'm going as far as the steamer will take me, and then I shall push on afoot, till I get beyond the claims which have already been taken up."

"Just so. Hope you may strike it rich."

"Have you ever been here before?" asked the man, "you speak like an old hand."

"Been here before? Ye gods and little fishes! Yes! I live up here. My home's at Weltonville."

"Weltonville? Where is that? I was told there were no towns above Dawson," the Klondiker replied.

"Then whoever told you that is a dead back number," chuckled the Unknown. "Weltonville is on the left bank of the Klondike, about ten miles above here. Yes, sir, and it is a very flourishing town."

"Indeed! Are the claims all taken up about there?"

"Not by any means. If you've got any money to invest I'll help you out."

"I mean to buy a claim if I can find one cheap."

"Then don't stop at Weltonville, sir, we don't have any cheap claims there. How large a place is it? Why, sir, you'll be amazed when you see it. Weltonville has its banks, its opera house, its churches, its market, its jails."

"Jails! Is it so large a place that it has to have more than one jail?" cried the astonished Klondiker.

"Large! It's a mile long," said the Unknown,

"and we have everything, I tell you—to be built."

"You're making game of me," said the man.

"Game! No, sir. Never play, thank you; when I was down in Mexico, in '81, I caught my best friend cheating me—two extra aces under the table—never turned a card since, and—by the Jumping Jeremiah! what's that?"

He was the first to catch sight of the hut which came sailing down the Klondike, with four persons and a big dog on the roof.

Running to the bow of the steamer, the Unknown pulled out an opera glass and leveled it at the hut.

Others crowded round him.

The Queen listed heavily to one side.

"Get back! Get back over the deck or we shall be swamped!" shouted the captain. "We can do nothing for them without risking every life on board!"

The dog was barking furiously, running about the roof, the two women were waving their handkerchiefs; one of the men shouted for help.

"Ye gods and little fishes! It's Weltonville!" the Unknown suddenly cried. "Captain, you must lend a hand!"

"Can't do it!" roared the captain. "Get back over the deck! Get back, or we'll go over, sure!"

"You must! I tell you it must be done!" shouted the Unknown. "In the name of humanity, Captain Peck! They are my friends!"

"In the name of humanity I'll do nothing of the kind!" cried the captain. "Let them shift for themselves. If that thing strikes the Queen, she is lost!"

The Unknown saw that it was no sort of use to plead his case further.

But he was a man of action and not easily downed.

There was a boat being towed astern and he knew it.

Gliding away among the crowd the strange man got down on the lower deck and hurried astern.

Meanwhile the Queen was rushing in toward the shore giving the floating hut a wide berth.

Suddenly the boat was seen dropping astern.

"Come back with that boat, you thief!" yelled Captain Peck.

This was going a step too far.

"Shame! Shame!" everybody cried.

The Unknown rested on his oars for an instant and shook his fist back at the Queen.

"Go to glory with your old tub!" he shouted. Only he did not say "glory," but something else.

Then he pulled out into the stream, so shaping his course that he was sure to head off the hut.

"It's the Unknown!" cried Ned Golden, who was watching all this.

"Hooray!" yelled Dick, throwing up his hat.

"Thank Heaven!" cried Edith; "but what can he do? They ain't going to pass us, Ned! Surely they won't do that!"

"That's just what they will," said Ned. "Still, I can hardly blame the captain, Edith. If we were to strike, there'd be serious damage done. Look how

she's loaded down. We must take our chances—we can't expect him to risk the lives of his passengers for our sake."

"Zed! Zed!" shouted Dick.

This was the name the boys usually called the Unknown.

They did so, for the reason that like everyone else they were ignorant of his true cognomen.

Ned and Dick first met the detective in New York, where on a certain evening he tried to arrest Ned, then apologizing in his usual style.

Later they met again on the voyage from Seattle to Juneau, and they had been together ever since.

"Hello!" shouted the Unknown, from his boat. "Weltonville, ahoy! Hello, Young Klondike! Hey, Dick, throw me a line!"

Ned ran down into the loft and got the rope.

He was none too soon.

A moment more and the boat was abreast the hut. The Unknown caught the line which Ned threw with all the skill of a cowboy.

It was easy to come alongside then.

He made fast, and, helped by Ned's hand, came up on the roof.

"Ah! good-evening, Edith," he said, raising his plug hat politely. "Mrs. Colvin, your most obedient. Down, Rover! Down! Really, I have reached Weltonville sooner than I expected. It's a case of the mountain coming to Mohammed. Boys, where are you bound?"

"Bound to the bottom, if something ain't done," said Dick, dolefully, and Ned hurriedly told what had occurred.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, this is interesting!" cried the Unknown. "The situation is striking, not to say wet—it may be wetter later on. Let me take a pull from my flask—drink and think. Just now I want a think more than a drink."

They could not help laughing in spite of themselves, for the man's good humor was simply irresistible.

Besides this, they knew perfectly well that the flask was empty—it always was, and yet its owner was seldom seen without it.

"Ha!" he exclaimed suddenly; "surrounded! Ye gods and little fishes, surrounded! Speaking of fishes, we'll do them out of their dinner yet!"

"What's surrounded?" asked Ned.

"The problem. I see my way out of this; boys, help me here; we want four boards off of this roof."

"For oars?" cried Dick.

"For sweeps, dear boy. There's a difference between oars and sweeps. I'll take a day off sometime and explain. Ned, where's the cold chisel? In the loft or in the shaft house? By the way, what made you leave the shaft house behind? We may want it where we locate next."

"You'll find it up on the creek all right, I reckon," laughed Ned, "the hammer and the cold chisel are in the loft, though. I'll drop down and get them."

"Look sharp, then! We're almost there!"

"Almost where?" asked Edith.

"Mouth of Bonanza Creek," said the Unknown, "and that's where we are going, and don't you forget it, dear boy—I mean dear girl; but say, Edith, I can never remember that you ain't as much of a boy as any of us. That's the talk, Ned, now we'll soon have the sweeps."

Ned had been down into the loft twice now, but both times he had neglected to look in the dark corner where poor Cal Remington lay.

In fact, in the excitement of the situation, their strange companion had been totally forgotten. Indeed, Ned had not even thought to mention him to the Unknown.

By this time the steamer had passed out of sight around a point of land.

The mouth of Bonanza Creek lay just ahead of the hut.

Using the hammer and cold chisel with all the skill of an old carpenter, the detective soon had ripped four boards off the roof.

The nails by which they had been fastened, he drove into the roof for rests, and each taking a board they threw two out on either side and began work.

It was hard pulling, but Ned soon saw that they were making headway.

"Steer around into the creek," said the Unknown. "If we can get inside the point, the current will throw us against the bank all right."

Now, this was precisely what came about in the end.

Without much difficulty the hut was worked around the point, and when they were well inside, they shipped their sweeps and let her drift.

A few moments of suspense and the hut grounded in shallow water under the bluff on the point.

"Hooray!" shouted the Unknown. "Saved! Saved! Mrs. Colvin, if you will permit me! That's the talk! Tra-la-la! Here we go!"

Really the Unknown was inimitable.

He flung his arm about fat Mrs. Colvin's waist and actually started to waltz with her on the roof.

CHAPTER V.

OFF FOR EL DORADO CREEK.

"STOP that, Zed! Brace up and tell us how to get ashore," cried Dick Luckey, as Mrs. Colvin tried in vain to get free.

"Brace up! Certainly, dear boy!" replied the Unknown—here he pretended to take a pull at the empty flask—"won't have any? No? Well, well, that's all right! A little drop of the crayther now and then is relished by the soberest men. Tell you how to get ashore? Why, my joy is so great that I am ready to tell you anything—even my name!"

"Tell it, then," laughed Edith. "We're all dying to know that!"

"My name is Noroal," cried the Unknown, striking an attitude; "on the Klondike hills my father feeds his flock. By Jove, I wish the old man was here with his flock or any other feller's flock. You'd see how soon I'd have a leg of roast mutton in the

oven. Well, let's see about getting ashore. There's the boat. What's the matter with rowing ashore like the respectable Klondikers that we are."

"Nothing at all," replied Ned. "Upon my word, I forgot the boat, and I've forgotten something else. What's become of poor Cal Remington all this time, Dick?"

"Cal Remington!" cried the Unknown. "Ye gods and little fishes, who may poor Cal Remington be? I thought I knew everyone in Weltonville. Perchance this mysterious Cal Remington is my man in disguise?"

"He's nothing of the sort," said Ned. "He's a poor fellow we rescued from the Klondike," and then the story of Cal Remington was told.

"We'd better go down and have a look at him at once," said the Unknown. "I don't like strangers, especially madmen. Lead the way, Ned."

Ned was first down the ladder, and those on the roof were startled at his sudden sharp exclamation.

"Great Scott! The man has gone!"

"Gone!" cried Dick. "Impossible! Where would he go to?"

Yet it was a fact, strange as it seemed.

Cal Remington had vanished and the loft was empty.

"He's tumbled down the ladder and drowned!" gasped Dick. "Great Heaven! This is the worst yet! We shall find his body in the room below."

They all thought so then, but they were wrong.

After they got Edith and Mrs. Colvin ashore, they were able by means of the rope and the boat to pull the hut up further into the shallows.

Ned now went on the roof, and stripping off his clothes, went down the ladder.

The water was clear and icy cold.

There was no difficulty in seeing all over the room.

But there was no Cal Remington—no trace whatever of the man.

Here was a mystery.

The boys and the Unknown spent most of the time left between daylight and darkness, talking about the whole strange affair.

But they were not idle, meanwhile.

In fact, they worked all the time.

Ned was a splendid swimmer and diver, and he had the worst of it.

It was necessary to get their belongings out of the hut, and while Dick stood in the loft and the Unknown on the roof Ned went down into the icy water again and again, and brought up everything which could be so brought up and passed them to Dick, who passed them on to the Unknown on the roof.

Meanwhile, Edith built a fire on the shore, and when the Unknown handed down the necessary provisions and pots and pans she and Mrs. Colvin prepared supper.

There were several hours of daylight left after they were through eating, and Ned and Dick, assisted by the Unknown, built two brushwood shelters to be used during the night.

Of course the gold came out first of all.

This was carefully buried on the shore, high above the water line, and the place so marked that they could not possibly mistake it, and at the same time every precaution was taken to obliterate all traces of their work.

At last all was done that could be done, and our little party was ready to enjoy their well earned rest.

But all this time they had been able to form no conclusion as to Cal Remington.

Positively the man's body was not in the hut, and there seemed no way by which he could have escaped, unless, indeed, he had crawled through the window, but to do that he would have been obliged to go down the loft ladder into the water, and it did seem just impossible that he could have done anything of the sort.

Morning came, and brought no solution of the mystery.

Ned was up at six o'clock; the sun was then an hour high, and the day was hot and sultry; the thermometer must have been over ninety in the shade.

This, however, is nothing for the Klondike. Frequently the thermometer runs over a hundred during these mid June days.

"Well, what's to be done?" asked Dick, as they sat at breakfast. "Here we are, house and all miles away from our claim. Shall we go back, or shall we travel on and try our luck somewhere else?"

"We'll hear from the Unknown," said Ned, cutting away at his bear steak.

The bear, by the way, had been drawn into the kitchen, and so came along with the house, which gave the Klondikers all the fresh meat they wanted.

"If you want my advice," said the Unknown, "I'll give it in a nutshell. Weltonville is ours. We own it lock, stock and barrel—it can't run away."

"Which means we'd better, since 172 has petered out," said Ned.

"Which means we have. When winter comes we can build another house and go back there, if we want to. We ain't paupers, I guess."

"Not much! How did you make out in Dawson City? That's the next question before the house."

"Well, dear boy, as you are very well aware, I went down to Dawson for the express purpose of getting the current reports on the various mining districts, to see if it would pay us to make a change."

"Exactly," said Dick; "and as we happen to know all about that what's the use in going into it?"

"I merely mentioned the fact, so that we could start right."

"Go on," said Edith. "What's the use in wasting words?"

"Well, I went all over the ground," continued the Unknown, and the result of my investigation was that the best paying claims worked last winter were up Bonanza Creek on El Dorado Creek, French Gulch, Adams Creek and Victoria Creek.

"All those empty into Bonanza Creek, don't they?" asked Edith.

"Everyone of them," said the Unknown, "and we

are right on the road to all. We did well during the winter, but there were others, who did better, that's why I say change."

"But isn't everything taken up on El Dorado Creek?"

"Every foot away up to the timber line."

"That's what I thought."

"You thought right, then. I ascertained this for a positive fact in Dawson. No one need hope to get a free claim on El Dorado, nor on any other creek emptying into Bonanza Creek, as far up as the Indian River mountains; the claim agents control all that is not held by actual miners."

"Which means we shall have to buy?" said Dick.

"Exactly."

"Is that worth while?"

"I say yes," declared Ned, positively. "If one claim peters out, the only thing for us to do is to take up with another."

"We might jump one," remarked Edith.

"So we might," said the Unknown. "There are hundreds on which the assessment work has not been done, but jumping is a dangerous business at best. We don't want to get into a fight nor into litigation. We've got lots of capital to work with, and I say let's buy a claim and have everything square and straight."

"We might divide our gold now and everybody buy for themselves," said Ned.

"Do you want to do that?" demanded the Unknown, quickly. "If that remark means that I ain't wanted in the firm, by the Jumping Jeremiah I'll get out!"

Ned threw up both hands.

"Hope I may die if I meant that!" he cried. "I want you to come into the firm. You know you have never been a full fledged member yet."

"So do I!" cried Dick.

"You know I do, Zed," said Edith. "Don't you be so touchy, which is the same as saying don't be a fool."

"Thank you—oh, thank you!" said the Unknown, pulling off his hat and making a low bow. "I'll come into the firm of Golden & Luckey. Proud to be a member."

"The fool says in his folly let's leave the gold buried where it is, all but one bag, which we will take with us up El Dorado Creek."

"I don't know whether that is the safest way or not," mused Ned.

"I think it is. The chance of any one finding it is slight. On the other hand, the chance of our being robbed on El Dorado is first-rate. There's a tough crowd up there."

"I say yes, on one condition," said Dick.

"What's that?" Ned asked.

"That one of us comes back, digs up the gold, and takes it down to the bank at Dawson City, just as quick as we have located our new claim."

"All agreed to," said Ned; "so that being settled, the sooner we start up Bonanza the better."

The remainder of the conversation related entirely to ways and means.

The start was made about an hour later.

Such things as were actually needed were stowed away in the boat.

Of the rest they made a cache; that is, dug a hole and buried them, raising a mound of earth over the goods.

Ned then blazed a tree and cut his initials on the blaze.

This is the common custom in the Klondike country.

Any one interfering with a cache lays himself liable to imprisonment, but usually it is something worse, but the thief, if caught, is pretty apt to be tried in Judge Lynch's court and hung to the nearest tree.

It was a heavy load for the boat, and there was scarcely room for them all.

But they managed to stow themselves away somewhere, and even Rover had his place.

There was but one pair of oars, and Ned took the first turn at them.

A hard pull of fifteen miles lay before them, but there were three to do the work, and they arrived safely at the mouth of El Dorado Creek later in the day, having performed the voyage without meeting a soul.

As they turned the boat into the creek, Rover began to bark.

"Someone coming!" cried Edith.

"There they are!" exclaimed Dick, as a boat loaded with men came into view round the point.

The Unknown, who was at the oars, changed his course so that they must pass very close to the strangers.

"Boat ahoy!" he shouted.

"Hello!" called back a grizzled old miner in the bow.

"Do you see your man in that crowd, Zed?" asked Dick.

"I see the man I want just about now—yes. Hello, there! Where you bound?"

"We're bound down to Dawson," answered the man. "Where are you fellers heading for?"

"Up El Dorado, prospecting."

"Better look out. There's no free claims up this way."

"Who said anything about a free claim? Do we look like boomers or claim jumpers? Nix komerouse. We're out to buy."

"That's different," said the miner. "I just thought I'd call your attention to the fact that Judge Lynch is always holding court on El Dorado."

"Thank you for nothing, my dear friend. Perhaps you could give us a pointer. You don't know who we are."

The men seemed to consult for a moment and then pulled their boat over toward the boys.

"Say," called the old man, "who's the boss of your crowd?"

"Let me introduce him," said the Unknown, point-

ing to Ned. "Young Klondike, Mr. Man. Mr. Man, Young Klondike. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Say," drawled the old man, "salt must have been kinder scarce up your way this winter; my name is Job Rusling. I've got a claim to sell, but I want to talk to the boss."

"Oh, I see. Wind was scarce up your way, and you're going down to Dawson for a fresh supply. Hain't got none to waste—I understand."

"Hold your horses, Zed," whispered Ned. "We'll be in a quarrel next. My name is Ned Golden, sir. We've been wintering on the Klondike—Claim 172."

"Hello! I've heard of you! Made a big strike! Yes, yes! Well, I'll sell my claim to you any time."

"What's your number?"

"Eighty-three, El Dorado. I've been working on one end of it, but there's plenty of show yet."

"Any luck?"

"I won't deceive you, young man. I took out ten thousand dollars, but it was only shaft work. Hain't drifted yet."

"I'd like to look at it."

"You may. You may work there three days and have all you find; by that time I'll be back again and we can talk biz."

"What's your price?"

"You may have it for just what I took out—ten thousand dollars. If I can double my stakes I'm going home."

"I will consider the offer," said Ned. "Write out a permit in case we should be interfered with."

"You won't be," said Mr. Rusling; "there's no claims being worked near me, but I'll write you the permit just the same."

He did so, and it was handed over to Ned.

Then the boats separated.

It was a long pull up El Dorado to 83.

The boat arrived there just before dark.

It was a forlorn looking spot.

On one side was a marsh overgrown with the tundra grass; on the other the bank rose abruptly, stretching away to the foothills.

Certainly no worse spot for gold digging could have been picked out.

"It's 83 all right, though," declared the Unknown, pointing to the big red numbers painted on a board which was nailed to a tree near the shore.

They pulled into the cove and landed.

A rude hut stood higher up on the bank, and near the hut was the prospect shaft.

No attempt was made to examine it that night.

Edith and Mrs. Colvin took possession of the loft, and the boys made a fire in Job Rusling's old stove.

Supper was soon served, and all were glad to turn in immediately afterward.

It was sound sleep that night, and Rover was left on guard.

Toward morning Ned was aroused by his barking.

He sprang up to find it broad daylight.

Seizing his gun, he ran out of the hut.

As he did so, he heard a wild laugh down below the hill toward the tundra.

It was a horrible, blood-curdling laugh, and then all in the same instant a voice shouted out:

"Gold! Gold! Gold!"

"Cal Remington!" gasped Ned, for of course the madman came into his mind at once.

He rushed to the edge of the bank, and was just in time to see a bare-headed man, with long black hair, go plunging in among the tundra.

He turned, looked back at Ned and waving his hand, shouted again:

"Gold! Gold! Gold!"

Then all in an instant he was gone.

"Cal Remington, sure enough!" cried Ned.

"Hey! Come back! Come back!"

It almost took his breath away, for if Ned had been certain of anything it was that Cal Remington was dead.

CHAPTER VI.

CAL REMINGTON'S CLAIM.

No answer came to Ned from out of the tundra, but that need not prevent us from explaining what the tundra is.

As soon as spring opens in Alaska, vegetation advances with wonderful rapidity, and upon all the low lands in the vicinity of the creeks and rivers, the wonderful tundra grass springs into life.

This grass is very coarse and strong, and grows to an enormous height, often above the head of an ordinary man.

Through it runs innumerable water courses, and the tundras, as these marshes are styled, are alive with ducks, offering the best shooting in the world.

Of course, there is no better hiding-place than a tundra, and as this one extended back for a mile or more, Ned quite despaired of finding Cal Remington as he ran down the hill.

He plunged into the tundra followed by the dog.

"Remington! Remington!" he shouted. "Don't be afraid! I won't hurt you! Hold on!"

Again he heard the lunatic's laugh, this time off on his right hand.

Rover seemed to grasp the situation and stopped barking.

Ned called again and again, but got no reply.

He was just about ready to give it up when all at once Rover gave a low growl, and Cal Remington rose up before him out of the grass.

"Call off your dog! Call off your dog!" he shouted.

"Down, Rover! Down!" cried Ned.

"Don't be afraid," he added. "He won't hurt you! Where have you been? How did you get out of the hut?"

The lunatic stared at him from under his heavy eyebrows.

"You are one of the boys who saved my life!" he said, slowly.

"Then why did you run away from me?" replied

Ned. "Come back to the hut; you will be kindly treated there."

"No, no! I can't go—I won't. Boy, what's your name?"

"Ned Golden. Come with me; you'll die here in the swamp."

"Stop! Listen to me! I'm mad! You know that; but just for the moment the fit has left me. I want to speak while I have a chance."

"I'll listen to anything you have to say," replied Ned, "but I wish——"

"Stop! Don't waste time. Boy, you saved my life. I don't forget. You lost your house—your camp was flooded out. I don't ask you how you got here, for it would take time to tell it, and there's no time to waste. Do you want to buy my claim?"

"We are here on El Dorado Creek to buy a claim; why not, if it's good?"

"It's the richest claim on El Dorado Creek. I shall never work it now, and you may as well use it as another—better. I'd like to do something in return for what you did for me."

"Come up to the hut and talk it over," said Ned. "My friends are there—we'll treat you right."

"No, no, no! I won't do it. Will you buy?"

"I suppose I ought to ask my partner—to see the claim."

"You don't want to see the claim. You don't have to pay for it till you've proved it. Listen! If I get my head right I'll call on you for the money; if I don't you may have the claim for nothing. Price, whatever you've a mind to give me above two thousand dollars. Is it a go?"

"Yes, I'll take it right now and chance it," said Ned, promptly. "Come up to the hut and I'll give you the dust."

"No, no, no! I won't do it—I say I won't. I don't want the dust. Here's the papers, boy. Take them. If I don't call for the money within a month you can give two thousand dollars to the hospital at Dawson. Here, I'll sign the transfer if you've got a pencil, though a pen would be better, I suppose."

Ned had a fountain pen with him, and seeing nothing for it but to humor the unfortunate man, he allowed him to sign the transfer on the back of the claim deed.

He had no other idea in doing this than to assist the poor fellow and to solve the mystery of his disappearance.

Indeed he never looked at the papers and scarcely believed that the claim amounted to anything great—how far from the truth he was will soon be seen.

"That's done!" cried the madman, handing back the pen with an air of profound satisfaction. "You may see me up at the claim to-morrow or next day, or next week, or next month, or never. Good-by, Ned Golden. Good luck be with you—I'm going now!"

"Stop! Don't go!" cried Ned.

"I must! It is useless to try and stop me."

"But at least tell me how you escaped from the hut."

"Escaped! I jumped out the window. It was sailing away."

"Then you must have gone down into the water?"

"I suppose so. I was all wet when I found myself in my canoe."

"Your canoe! It was carried down the river."

"I found it in a cove but a little way from your place, boy, and I found myself in it at the same time. Don't try to question me. I remember next to nothing. If you asked me how I came here I couldn't tell you, and if you ask me where I'm going, my answer to be the truth, would have to be that I don't know."

"Come with me," said Ned, suddenly catching him by the arm.

The action had anything but the desired result.

Cal Remington pulled himself away with a loud cry.

"No, no, no, no! They'll lynch me!" he yelled.

He plunged in among the tundra, shouting:

"Gold, gold, gold!"

He was gone before Ned could try again to stop him.

It was all useless to call after him or attempt to follow.

Ned did both, but he could not come up with him.

Soon the trail vanished.

Ned came out upon one of the water courses.

Had Cal Remington plunged in and drowned himself?

It looked so.

There was no trace of him.

On the other side of the stream the tundra grass remained undisturbed.

Ned was forced to give it up at last, for even Rover could not help him.

Calling the dog to follow, he returned to the hut.

Just before he reached it, he heard several shots, and Rover bounded away from him.

Soon Ned came upon Edith with her rifle, and there was Rover with a fat duck in his mouth.

"Where in the world have you been, Ned?" demanded Edith. "Dick is out looking everywhere for you, and even the Unknown is getting worried on your account."

"You'll be amazed when you hear what I've got to tell," replied Ned; "Edith, I've been buying a claim."

They talked it over at breakfast—a brace of fat ducks made the meal.

"It beats me," said Dick. "I don't see how he could have got out of the hut, but all the same, Ned, I don't suppose you've seen a ghost."

"Well, hardly," laughed Ned. "Here's the documents to prove that I was neither drunk nor dreaming. I suppose I was a fool to give my promise and buy a pig in a bag, but I did it more because I wanted to help the poor fellow out than for any other reason."

"Let's have a look at them," said the Unknown. "These seem to be all right. Claim 138, west range.

Her Majesty, Queen Victoria, to her faithful subject, Calvin J. Remington, all that parcel of land, etc., etc.; really, there seems to be no flies on this."

"I say, let's act on it and give it a fair trial if this claim fails," said Ned.

"Agreed to," replied the Unknown. "Now to work! I'll bet a big nugget that there is no gold here."

It certainly did not look very promising.

There were plenty of mining tools in the hut, so it was not necessary to disturb their own supply in the boat.

Ned and Dick went down into the shaft, and Edith and the Unknown lent their aid above ground.

They worked hard all the morning, and the result was just two ounces of dust.

"This won't suit me," declared Ned, at dinner. "I don't see any use in going further."

"It certainly ain't what we've been used to," said Dick.

"We can do as well back at Weltonville," declared the Unknown. "The first pay streak we worked through undoubtedly runs over on Dick's claim, and we may as well go back and try our luck there as to fool with a thing like this."

"Consider it settled, then," said Ned. "We'll move on up the creek, and try our luck at Cal Remington's claim."

CHAPTER VII.

"GET OFF THIS CLAIM!"

"HERE's the place!"

"That's what!"

"Claim No. 138, west range. Nowhere, ahoy! Send out your custom house sharks to see if we are smugglers! No answer! Then the land is ours! Hoist the Stars and Stripes! Edith, you shall name the new camp!"

The boat had gone on up El Dorado Creek, and had now reached Claim No. 138.

The Unknown as full of his talk as usual, turned her bow in shore, as he made these remarks.

Ned sprang out, followed by Dick, and they helped Mrs. Colvin ashore.

Edith came out without assistance, and the boat was pulled high up on the sandy beach.

"This looks more like it!" cried Ned. "That creek comes straight down from the mountains. It ought to bring gold with it."

"We'll get everything out and build a couple of brush huts, before we do anything else," said Dick. "Somehow or other I feel as though we had come here to stay."

It certainly was a pleasant place.

There was no tundra in sight, and the land which sloped gently down to the creek from the foot hills was well wooded.

They had passed many mining camps on their way up, but although everybody they met put the question, Ned had been careful not to tell where they were bound, for which caution he now felt that he had

reason to congratulate himself. There was no camp in sight, and this suited exactly, for the roughest of the Klondikers were located along El Dorado Creek, and all felt that it was a great deal better to be alone.

But they were to be disappointed in this.

Shortly after supper, while Ned was playing his banjo on the bluff, Edith joining him with her sweet voice, the Unknown suddenly sprang up off the grass and pointed up the creek.

"Boat coming!" he cried. "Look alive, boys! This is a tough spot! We can't tell whether it means friend or foe."

He seized his rifle and Ned and Dick followed his example.

There were four men in the boat. It was coming down the creek, heading directly toward their camp.

"Get inside, Edith!" cried the Unknown, fixing his opera glass upon the new-comers. "I don't like the look of those fellows for a cent. In fact, I strongly suspect that one of them is my man."

"Quit your nonsense!" cried Ned. "Give me the glass. I want to see for myself."

He seized the glass and turned it on the boat.

"Yes, they're an ugly looking crowd," he said. "There's a chap there who has only one eye; he's about the worst looking customer I've seen in a long time."

"That's my man," gravely declared the Unknown.

"Will you quit?" cried Dick. "This is really serious. Edith, please go inside."

"I don't want to do it, but I suppose I must if you all say so."

"It's better," said Ned. "This is no place for you, if there's going to be a row."

Edith went into the shelter without another word.

"That's all right," said the Unknown. "Now boys, you leave all talk to me. I don't know why I feel so sure that there's going to be trouble, but somehow I do."

They stood on the bluff with their rifles ready.

As the boat drew nearer, the Unknown hailed it in his usual comical way.

"Ship ahoy! Ship ahoy!" he shouted. "Where are you bound?"

"None of your danged business!" the one-eyed man called back. "Who the blazes are you?"

"I'm the Marquis of El Dorado!" roared the Unknown. "This is my tiger preserve. No stragglers allowed, but plenty of room for every honest man!"

"Well, we fill that bill," sneered the man, "but I'm blame sure you don't. You want to hustle off that land, or you'll find yourselves in the hands of Judge Lynch."

"What did I tell you?" whispered the Unknown. "So much for trying our luck on a madman's claim. I'll bet you what you like, Ned, this claim has been sold or jumped a dozen times, but don't you be discouraged! I mean to hold the fort."

"So do we until we are forced to abandon it!" cried Ned. "What do you say, Dick?"

"Yes, every time," replied Dick. "Let them show cause before they talk about driving us off."

"We are coming ashore, and we are going to read the riot act to you!" cried the one-eyed man. "Don't you try to muss with us—it will be the worse for you if you do."

"Come on!" called the Unknown. "Come right on with your old ark! We're ready for you every time."

The boat pulled ashore.

Neither the boys nor the Unknown spoke until the men had landed and started up the bank.

"Stay where you are!" cried the Unknown, suddenly flinging up his rifle. "We can talk so."

"Drop that gun!" snarled the man.

He probably meant that Ned and Dick should do the same, for they had theirs up, too.

"We've got the drop on you," chuckled the Unknown. "Sonny, I came out here to the Klondike on purpose to get the drop on a fellow about your size."

"Gentlemen," said one of the others, "we may as well talk this matter over quietly. Put down your arms and we'll keep ours down. There need be no bloodshed if you are disposed to do the fair thing."

"That's what we are, every time," said Ned, "but we don't propose to be bulldozed, and we don't move out of here to-night."

"Nobody asks you to do that; if you'll go to-morrow that will be soon enough."

"That depends; we have bought this claim."

"Bought it of who?"

"Cal Remington."

"Cal Remington is dead."

"He wasn't when we bought the claim. I can prove that."

"You must have bought the claim last fall, then; the man you speak of was a murderer and a thief, and the boys lynched him."

"And then jumped his claim?"

"Exactly so. We own here and we propose to stand out for our rights."

"Have you done the assessment work?"

"The time is not up yet. We are here to do it now."

"Then you have no rights. We have."

"What right?"

"A deed from Calvin J. Remington to myself."

"Who are you?"

"He's Jay Gould's nephew," called the Unknown, "and I'm Vanderbilt's brother-in-law—you'd better not come any further, my good friend."

The men were edging up nearer all the while, but as the Unknown threw up his rifle while speaking, they halted, acting as though uncertain just what was best for them to do.

"Are you a lunatic, or what are you?" growled the man with one eye.

"Oh, I'm no lunatic, but I'm just getting over the small pox and my head's a little light," chuckled the Unknown.

"We'll make it lighter for you before we are

through. Shut up, will you. I want to talk to this other feller—not to you.”

“Feller yourself. My friend’s a gentleman.”

“Give me a chance, will you?” interposed Ned.

“Yes, give him a show! Lew up one side of your mouth and clap a cork in the other,” growled the one-eyed man. “Now then, young feller, fire away.”

“It’s just here, gentlemen,” said Ned. “I don’t want anything but what’s right. I hold Cal Remington’s deed just as I tell you, and if that deed has no value I want to know it. I’m ready to move off this claim if anybody has a better right to it than I have myself.”

“That’s the talk!” interrupted the Unknown. “We are law abiding citizens, we are, but we ain’t going to be coaxed off this claim, nor kicked off, nor bulldozed off, nor scared off, nor——”

“Dry up, dry up!” sneered the one-eyed man. “Why don’t you pull that plug hat of yourn down over your potato trap? Sich a windy beggar I never did see!”

“That’s my position, gentlemen,” said Ned, with dignity, “and my suggestion to you is that you do not attempt to make us any trouble here.”

“Well, say, we ain’t looking for trouble,” said the mild man, “but I tell you once for all, we don’t propose that none but ourselves shall work this claim.”

“That’s nothing to me. Prove your rights.”

“Prove ’em to who? A fellow that’s ashamed of his name don’t cut no very large amount of ice with us.”

“Who says I’m ashamed of my name?”

“You don’t seem to be very anxious about telling it.”

“My name is Ned Golden.”

“Phew! Young Klondike, of 172?”

“That’s me. This gentleman is Dick Luckey.”

“And the windy one—who’s he?”

“Mr. Zedekiah Skiffington, of Skiffville,” put in the Unknown. “Now, then, you know us all, what do you propose to do about it? Say?”

“We propose to run you off this claim!” cried the one-eyed man, and he suddenly flung up his rifle and fired straight at the Unknown.

The shot was a miss.

Ned and Dick let fly, but they were equally unfortunate.

The men were just about to fire again when Edith stepped out of the hut.

Her rifle was at her shoulder, and in quick succession she fired four shots.

The first went through the mild man’s hat; the second took the one-eyed man in the arm, and he dropped his rifle and ran.

What became of the others or the ones Ned, Dick and the Unknown fired at they had no chance to learn, for the men broke and ran for their boat.

It would have been easy to have shot them down now, but Ned held up his hand.

“Let them go! Let them go!” he breathed. “We

don’t want any dead men here if we can get along without it.”

“He’s right. We’ve got all the business we want on our hands as it is,” said the Unknown.

And they stood there on the bluff with their rifles ready, watching the boat as it pulled away.

“You’ll hear from us again!” shouted the mild man. “Judge Lynch will settle with you.”

“Give my compliments to the judge and tell him to come right down here and go to work!” the Unknown roared. “We are going to stop right here! You nor no other live man can crowd us off this claim.”

There was no answer made to this defiant speech, and the boat pulled away up El Dorado Creek, and was seen no more that night.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE MASTODON’S MOUTH.

THERE was no sleep for Young Klondike that night. He watched until daybreak with Dick and the Unknown.

As soon as the sun rose Ned made coffee, and they three took a hurried breakfast and set out to explore the claim, leaving Edith and Mrs. Colvin to sleep until a more respectable hour, for it was as yet only about three o’clock.

“We’ll see just what we’ve got and locate our points of beginning,” declared the Unknown. “Trouble there’s going to be, sure, and we may have to pull out and make good our claim before we locate here permanently. Perhaps it won’t be worth while.”

As usual, the Unknown’s suggestions were full of sound, common sense.

The first thing was to explore the claim and understand its limits.

Of course they did not go back its entire length, which was more than a mile, but they did examine every foot of the ground along the creek.

There had been two prospect holes sunk, and they found a pile of ashes which marked the spot where a hut had been burned.

Ned suggested a careful examination of both prospect holes, and this was the next step.

There was some *color* to the dirt that came, but not much.

This was rather a disappointment.

Ned had allowed himself to believe that they were going to strike it rich at the start.

“Don’t seem to be anything worth fighting about here,” remarked the Unknown after they had worked out a few panfuls from each prospect hole; “ye gods and little fishes! I don’t care to risk my life fighting for a hole in the ground, and this seems to be all we’ve got. Hello, Young Klondike! What’s the matter with you? Snake bit you? You jumped so, you scared me.”

“I’m a fool!” cried Ned, slapping his leg.

“Shouldn’t wonder a bit. Most of us are.”

“Cal Remington told me where to look.”

“He did, eh? Then by the Jumping Jeremiah, it’s a blame pity you didn’t tell it before.”

"Oh, it wasn't when I met him in the tundra—it was while he was in the hut."

"Thought he was raving all the time he was in the hut."

"So he was; it was in his ravings he said it."

"Said what?"

"I located it by the split cedar tree near the white rock." You remember, Dick?"

"Why, of course, I do," said Dick. "Strange, neither of us thought of it before."

"There was method in his madness you think, then?" said the Unknown.

"I'm sure there was—so sure that I'd be willing to swear to it."

"Nobody asks for that. Instead of swearing, suppose we look for the split cedar and the white rock."

Instead of answering, Ned just started off on the run.

"Hello! What's the row? Have you gone mad, too?" shouted the Unknown.

"Come on! Come on!" cried Ned. "I know where the split cedar is! Follow me!"

He ran up to the top of the hill, Dick and the Unknown following.

Here he pointed down into a gulch between the hills.

A low scrubby cedar with a split trunk grew there. It was the only thing resembling a tree in sight, and near it was a large white rock.

"That's it! That's it!" cried Dick. "Strange I should have forgotten that, but then I thought it all a part of Cal Remington's madness."

"So did I," shouted Ned, running down the hill, "but you see now, it wasn't. This is the place—we'll go for it! I believe on my soul we're going to strike it the richest kind down there."

But when they reached the bottom of the hill they could discover no signs of work having been done.

"It was his imagination," said Dick.

"Just his crazy fancy," declared the Unknown. "Ned, this is no place for gold."

But Ned thought differently.

"I don't care what you say," he declared, "I believe our fortune lies right here in this gulch."

"Then we'll explore, dear boy," declared the Unknown. "I never go back on the boss. Dick, you ought to be able to find it. Luckey's your name."

"I'd rather have a name that could be punished with bad puns than none at all," laughed Dick; "but don't you forget it I'll look, and if there's anything to be found I'm usually on hand."

They went all over the ground with great care.

But no trace of previous workings could be discovered.

At last Dick's attention was directed to a spot where there were a great many loose stones scattered over the ground.

Ned and the Unknown were further up the gulch at the time.

Dick stopped and looked hard at the stones.

"Upon my word I don't see how those came to be

here," he muttered; "they look just as if they had been put down there on purpose."

It flashed over him all of a sudden that this might be the place.

He stooped down and began throwing aside the stones.

Before he had worked five minutes he knew that he had hit it.

The ground had been turned over under the stones—that anybody could see.

A shout brought Ned and the Unknown back again.

"This is the place," declared Dick. "I'm sure this is the place."

"Blame me if I don't think you're right," said the Unknown. "Ned, this ground has been recently turned up. I said that Dick would be the boy to find it out."

"You did, and so he has, if I know anything. See, it's right on a line with the split cedar, too."

"You fellows run back and get the tools!" cried Dick. "I'll work away on the stones. Somebody ought to keep a watch on the creek, too; it ain't right for us to leave Edith and Mrs. Colvin there alone."

"I'll wake Edith up," said Ned. "She's better able to take care of herself than we are to take care of her every time."

They were back in less than ten minutes, reporting Edith awake and on the alert.

By this time Dick had the stones pretty well cleared away.

It was now plain to see that a long, narrow trench had been dug and filled up again.

It was certainly the place they were looking for, and the only place where Claim No. 138 had been worked.

"Go for it, boys!" cried the Unknown, seizing a pick-ax and jumping in to work.

Ned and Dick took the spades and they soon had the trench opened for its entire length, to a depth of two feet or more.

But not a trace of gold so far.

"There ain't much in this," declared Ned, wiping his perspiring brow.

"Haven't even seen a color," said Dick, dolefully.

"Why, don't you understand, boys, you can't expect it," declared the Unknown. "I should think your own common sense would tell you that."

"What do you mean?" demanded Ned.

"What do I mean? Why, it's plain enough. The dirt we've taken out so far is dirt that has been out before and was put back again—I should think you could understand."

"By thunder! You're right there! It must be so!"

"Of course it's so. We've got to get below the line of Cal Remington's workings if we expect to make anything out of this."

"Easy to do. Only needs time," said Ned. "Keep it up, boys! Keep it up!"

They worked with a will for the next half hour.

Then Edith came over the hills and brought them their breakfast.

"Mrs. Colvin will keep watch," she declared. "I knew you wouldn't want to leave off."

"We don't want to leave off—we can't leave off," said Ned. "We are getting down to hard pan now."

A little more and they struck it.

The dirt now, instead of being loose and easily worked, was frozen hard and in the usual style of Klondike diggings.

"What Cal Remington found must have been right here on top," said the Unknown, "and that's very unusual. I don't understand this claim at all."

"Hooray! I do!" shouted Dick.

They had been trying to work the frozen ground without building a fire on it, as they would have to do before work to amount to anything was done.

Dick's pick struck something hard, and came up with a shimmer of gold on the end.

"It's down there! It's down there! I've surely struck a big nugget!" he cried.

"That's what's the matter," assented Ned, excitedly. "We've got to get down to it. Edith, get the bar, like a good girl. Now's the time to build a fire and thaw out."

Edith hurried away and soon returned with the bar. She was full of excitement.

"There's a boat away up the creek leading toward us!" she cried.

"You don't mean it!" exclaimed Ned, disgustedly. "Look here, Edith, we are in it at last!"

"In luck?"

"Oh, no! Here's one small nugget with a hole through it, knocked by Dick's pick-ax. What we are in is something else entirely. How much time have we got before the boat can reach us, think?"

"Oh, half an hour. Mrs. Colvin will keep watch and let us know."

"So will I!" cried the Unknown, seizing his rifle and jumping out of the hole. "Ye gods and little fishes! They may take a notion to land somewhere short of the cove and pounce down upon us over the hills."

"Stick to it! Keep your eye peeled. We're in it, and we'll work straight on till we are forced to quit. It will take a good deal to make me give up now."

"In what? What do you mean?" demanded Edith, as she hurried down toward the trench.

"In the mastodon's mouth," laughed Ned. "Now, then, what do you think of that?"

It was time for Edith to take a lesson in Arctic geology, and the Unknown undertook the job, as he paced up and down, with his rifle all ready for the enemy.

"You see that mass of bone down there in the trench," he began; "well, that means a mastodon, or prehistoric elephant. Thousands of their skeletons have been found in the Arctic regions, so there's nothing strange in our striking one here."

"Is it really a mastodon?" questioned Edith, look-

ing down at the dark mass of bone which lay across the trench.

"I'm sure of it," said Ned. "You see, this is the head; the skeleton lies on its side with the jaws upward. Here's the beginning of one tusk, and the other is hidden as yet. Oh, yes, there is no doubt of it, Edith. We've struck a mastodon, and we are working right in its mouth."

"How interesting!" cried Edith; "but I thought elephants only lived in warm countries?"

"Why that's so, but it was once warm all the year round up here. Any book on geology will tell you that."

"How do they know?"

"Oh, for various reasons; the mastodon is not the only tropical animal whose remains are found; besides that there are lots of fossil shells and plants found in many parts of the Arctic regions, and these without an exception are such as could have lived in a warm climate; but that ain't the strangest part of it all."

"What do you refer to?"

"To the mastodons found frozen in the ice in Siberia; frozen entire with the remains of their last meal still undigested in their stomachs. That shows that the cold time must have come upon the Arctic regions suddenly, but what brought it on nobody knows."

This rather dry discussion was brought to a sudden end by a shout from Dick.

"Here's the other tusk!" he exclaimed. "It's just as you thought, Ned. We are working in the mastodon's mouth."

"It's certain that Cal Remington never worked as low as this," said Ned. "I'm looking for gold and not mastodons. I'm afraid we ain't going to strike it here."

"Who says so!" shouted Dick, suddenly, stooping down and pulling a big nugget out of the frozen earth. "Hooray, for our side! Look at this!"

It was a nugget as big as a hen's egg! Dick had discovered it right in the mastodon's mouth.

"That's the talk!" exclaimed Ned. "If there's one, there's more. It's working just like our claim at Weltonville. I think we'd better quit and build a fire and go at it in the regular way."

"Give the bar one dig more, Ned," said Dick. "I believe we are right on the verge of a big discovery. It won't do to give up now."

"All right! Once more for luck!"

"For Luckey!" called the Unknown. "Work away, there! You are safe as long as I'm on guard." Ned drove the bar deep into the earth.

It struck something hard, and would go no further.

"Another nugget!" cried Edith, realizing what had occurred.

"The lower jaw of the mastodon," said Ned. "That's what. I won't try to drive it deeper. Here goes for a pull."

He and Dick got hold of the bar and exerting all their strength, succeeded in loosing a large mass of earth.

This they tumbled into another part of the trench out of the way of the skeleton.

Ned seized the pick-ax and began breaking it up.

Instantly all saw that a rich strike had been made.

The frozen earth was full of nuggets of unusual size.

Little doubt about flake gold being there, too.

This, of course, could not be fully determined without working it, but they could see some as it was.

"We've struck it, we've struck it!" shouted Ned wildly, and the cry brought the Unknown up.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah! You have struck it, for fair!" he cried; "struck it in the mastodon's mouth!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE ASTONISHING LUCK OF MR. JEREMIAH JUKES.

OF course there was the greatest excitement now.

Ned and Dick went right to work to break up the frozen clods and pick out the nuggets.

The Unknown resumed his march on the hillside.

Edith brought the gold pan and passed it down into the trench.

It was a cheerful sound to hear the nuggets dropping into it.

And let no one deceive themselves into believing that on the Klondike one has only to scrape the earth and pick out the nuggets like this.

Exactly the contrary is the case.

Such a thing can't be done on the Klondike, or anywhere else.

It was entirely unusual to make such a strike so near the surface even here, and no one appreciated that fact better than Ned and Dick.

But fortune had favored Young Klondike, and no mistake.

In a few moments the pan was filled to the brim with nuggets.

Ned was handing it up out of the hole to Edith, when the Unknown, looking off toward the hills, suddenly shouted:

"Who goes there?"

"What do you see?" cried Ned, springing out of the hole.

"A stranger approacheth," replied the Unknown, dramatically. "The fun begins with the strike."

Dick made a dive for his rifle.

"Stop!" said the Unknown. "One guard's enough. Take a fool's advice, boys, and keep right on working. Edith, my dear, do you mind going to the top of the hill and seeing how it is with that boat?"

"I'll do it!" cried Edith.

"Don't get out of range, though; we may need you. Don't forget that you're the only decent shot among us. As for me, my eyesight is so poor that I wouldn't guarantee to hit a barn door at fifty feet, for I'm blest if I could tell whether it was open or shut."

Now this was the merest nonsense.

The Unknown's sight was perfect, but it was still a fact that he was a wretched shot, and Edith as good a one as there was in the whole Klondike coun-

try—something that the brave girl had proved over and over again.

Edith ran up the hill and the boys returned to the trench.

All were fully on the alert, for all saw a tall, gaunt, dilapidated-looking individual, making his way toward them down the hill.

"It's your Cal Remington—that's who it is," said the Unknown.

"Nothing of the sort," said Ned, decidedly.

"Don't bear the faintest resemblance to him," declared Dick.

"Then it's the advance guard of the enemy and we must be cautious. Leave it all to me. What be there on the hill? Edith, do you see the boat?"

"No, I don't!" called Edith. "It ain't in sight anywhere."

"Exactly. I thought so," said the Unknown. "This is move No. 2. They are willing that we should do the work, and let them jump in and gather up the spoils. I wish those nuggets were out of sight."

But the nuggets were very much in sight, and as the stranger could easily see them from where he now was, it seemed hardly worth while to put them out of the way.

"Hey, boss, put down that gun!" he called, as he drew near. "Yer kinder skear me flourishing it about so; ther blame thing might go off."

"Judge," said the Unknown solemnly, "this gun is guaranteed to go off exactly at the right time. Who are you, and what do you want?"

"Who'm I? Why, I hain't noboddy at all," growled the man.

"No you don't! I'm in that business myself. We don't want opposition. You've got to tell your name."

"Who said I wouldn't tell it," replied the man, coming nearer. "I ain't ashamed of it, I reckon. My name's Jeremiah Jukes."

"Huh! Your name is as ugly as your face, then."

"Now looker hyar, stranger, take a fool's advice, and don't you get mussy. I'm an honest man."

"So are we," said the Unknown, "but we don't love strangers. Give an account of yourself, and tell us what you want here?"

"I want a job."

"You don't mean that?"

"Yes, I do."

"Who sent you here?"

"Nobody sent me. I've been working up to Budd Dinzey's camp. They're in hard luck there, and didn't want me any longer, so I thought I'd drift down along the creek, and see what I could strike."

It was very unusual, this.

There were few persons at that time willing to work for wages on the Klondike or among the diggings of Bonanza Creek.

Still the stranger seemed to be in earnest.

He sat down wearily with the air of a man who had walked a long way.

Pulling out an old clay pipe he filled it and prepared for a smoke.

"Say, I heard there was some new parties to work down hyar," he remarked; "thought mebbe I could get a show hyar. No harm asking, is there? A man can't never expect to get a job unless he tries; b'gosh, you've struck it rich, hain't you? Them things all gold?"

"No, they're brass," said the Unknown. "We had 'em made on purpose, so that fools could ask questions about them."

"That's for me, I s'pose; you're blame smart," said the man, in the same unruffled tone. "Waal, I can't make you give me work unless you want to—that's sure. If you don't need no helper I'll just have my smoke out, rest myself a bit, and then travel on."

There was something about his careless manner that greatly impressed Dick.

"I don't believe that fellow has any designs against us," he whispered to Ned.

"All the same we don't want him here."

"We could make splendid headway with another man."

"Yes, if he'd really work and not fool around and rob us of twice his pay in the end."

"We could look out for that."

"What makes you so anxious to hire him, Dick?"

"I ain't anxious. I'm only thinking how the work could be pushed ahead with another man."

"I suppose it could."

"Ask him more about himself, Ned; it's foolish to be afraid of him just because of what happened last night."

Ned called to Mr. Jeremiah Jukes to come nearer, and began to question him.

The man's replies were satisfactory enough.

He seemed to be a harmless, shiftless sort of a fellow; his claim was that he came up from Oregon the previous summer.

"You see, boss, I located one claim up onto Victoria Creek," he went on to say, "and I sunk every dollar I had into it. Didn't pan out. Then I drifted down to El Dorado. No claims to be had here 'less you buy one, and I hadn't nothing to buy with, so I just had to go to work for other folks, and I've been working for wages ever sence—that is, when I could get any work to do."

"Didn't you come down in a boat from up the creek?" asked Ned, suddenly.

"Gosh, no! I came down on Shank's mare. I hain't got no boat."

"Didn't you see a boat just now on the creek? About half an hour ago, say."

"Yes; I did. There was three men into it. They pulled over to the other shore and landed thar. Guess they were prospectors; looked so to me."

"Didn't you know them?"

"No; I didn't. Didn't never seen 'em before."

"Wasn't one of them a one-eyed man?"

"No, sir! Thar's only one one-eyed man around these diggings, and that's Budd Dinzey, as mean a

skunk as ever lived. My boss for a week, but I wouldn't work for him again nohow, though I own I didn't quit him of my own accord, but because there was no work to do."

Now all this seemed very frank and honest.

Ned looked at the Unknown who had been silently listening, and saw him nod, as much as to say, "hire him."

Dick was entirely of the same mind.

"What pay do you want?" asked Ned.

"Ten dollars a day is what's a-going, boss. I won't rob you, nether. Say, you needn't be afraid of me. I know Budd Dinzey was down hyar last night. I saw him pull down the crik. Mebbe you had a muss with him?"

"He was here, and we did have trouble," replied Ned. "He claims No. 138 as his."

"He's a liar! I heard him say that he meant to jump the claim some day, but I know blame well he never done a day's work onto it in his life."

"Did you know Cal Remington?" asked Ned, abruptly.

"Only by hearsay. This yer claim was his'n. He got in a muss with a man named Toller, who was found dead in his shanty with a bullet through his heart early last winter. Folks said Remington killed him, and Dinzey and his gang held Lynch court onto him and they wuz a-going to hang him, but he managed to get away from 'em, and took to the mountains. I don't doubt but what he died there."

"I guess we'd better take this man on," said Ned. "Dick, what do you say?"

"I say yes," assented Dick.

"Same here," called out the Unknown.

"You can go to work," said Ned.

"Well, thank you, boss. I'll rest to-day, if it's all the same to you. To-morrow I'll dust right in."

"Staying here to-night?"

"Sartain sure. Whar else should I stay if I'm going to work?"

"We've got no shanty. We've just come."

"That's all right, too. If you can lend me a pair of old blankets I'll be obleeged to yer. I'm quite well used to sleeping on the rough side of a stone."

"What do you think of him?" Ned asked of the Unknown later on.

"I think he's a spy sent by the enemy, and that's why I wanted you to engage him."

"Hello! That's a queer idea."

"Ain't it better to have him with us, than to have him go back to Budd Dinzey and report our find?"

"I see! You don't mean he shall go back?"

"Not until I'm ready to let him—no, dear boy."

Just here the Unknown showed his usual level headedness.

Mr. Jeremiah Jukes was now regularly engaged, and went to work in the trench.

The result of that day's panning was most satisfactory.

Before Ned was ready to quit for the night, it became certain that a big strike had been made.

Jukes worked splendidly.

He was as strong as a horse, and made nothing of digging right into the frozen ground.

But this was not the way to do it, and Ned decided to go at the business in the regulation Klondike fashion next morning.

There was no alarm that night.

A constant watch was maintained, the boys dividing the time with the Unknown.

Jukes rolled himself up in the blankets and slept under a tree, never moving until Ned gave him the call at six o'clock.

The second day's work in the trench was even more satisfactory than the first.

A huge fire was built at the start and the ground thawed out, the actual digging not beginning until nine o'clock.

"Strange that we should strike pay dirt so near the surface, ain't it?" remarked Dick, as they came upon another nest of nuggets first thing.

"There's only one way to account for it," replied Ned, "and that is by the theory that the bedrock has been forced up higher than usual. We are down now about five feet. As a rule bedrock is not struck under twenty feet, but I predict we shall not have to go ten feet before we strike it here."

"That is five feet more?"

"Yes."

"That will interfere with our drifting, won't it?"

"Not at all. Instead of making an underground drift as we did at Weltonville, we will extend our trench indefinitely on both sides; as long as that pays we need not work underground."

"You are determined to locate here, I suppose, Ned. Well, I don't see that we can do any better at present. We'll stick it out a few days as we are, and then clean up and run down to Dawson and bank our dust. There I'll have the claim registered in my name, and hire as many men as we can find, up to say twenty. That will give us a working force and a fighting force, and enable us to hold our own."

"Suppose the claim is jumped in the meantime?"

"Then we'll have to fight for our rights, that's all."

"And what do you propose to do with Jukes—take him along with us, or leave him behind?"

"We'll decide when the time comes. He's working all right now; perhaps the Unknown is away off, and the fellow is straight."

"Yes, but the Unknown is usually right. You know I'm inclined to trust the fellow, Ned, but I don't set my opinion against yours or his."

While this conversation was going on, Mr. Jeremiah Jukes was working in one end of the trench, and the boys in the other.

They had now attacked the ground on either side of the mastodon's head, as it was impossible to work below it, and to have unearthed the skeleton of the prehistoric elephant would have taken a week, at least.

Jukes worked faster than either Ned or Dick.

Edith had gone along the shore duck shooting, and the Unknown, who certainly did not love handling

pick and shovel, was keeping guard among the hills.

Things were thus working smoothly, when suddenly Jukes gave a loud shout.

"Bygum! I've struck it!" he cried. "Boys, I'm right in it rich!"

Ned and Dick threw down their shovels and started for the other end of the trench.

Before they could get there they saw Jukes hold up an enormous nugget, the biggest they had ever seen.

"This is a bird!" he shouted; "this yere is worth five thousand dollars, if it's worth a cent."

It was certainly an enormous nugget—nearly as big as Jukes' head.

But the boys were not destined to get a closer view of it just then.

Suddenly Jukes dropped it with a sharp cry.

The nugget vanished.

So did Jukes.

"Gee whiz! I'm a-goner!" he yelled.

Then he wasn't there.

At the bottom of the trench where he had stood, was a hole.

Jukes had gone down the hole.

"Help! Murder! I'm all smashed to pieces!" the astonished boys heard him yelling underground.

Such was the wonderful luck of Mr. Jeremiah Jukes.

CHAPTER X.

THE ENORMOUS STRIKE IN THE CAVE.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah! What's all this?"

It was the Unknown, of course.

Attracted by the shout of Mr. Jeremiah Jukes, he came running down the hill.

"Jukes, Jukes!" cried Ned, calling down the hole.

"There! I told you he'd go back on us!" exclaimed the Unknown. "Where is he? Has he run up the gulch with all the gold he can lug?"

"Nothing of the sort! He's tumbled down the hole!" replied Ned.

"Hole—what hole?"

"Come and see! Jukes, Jukes!"

"Hello!" came faintly out of the hole. "I'm all right, boys! I got a clip in the head and it sorter knocked me silly, but I'm all right now!"

"What's down there? Where are you? I can't see a thing!"

"Oh, I'm here—blamed if I can tell you what there is. Get a lantern and a rope. The big nugget is here, too, and that's worth hauling out even if my carcass ain't."

"That's what's the matter, and I'll go for them," cried the Unknown, to whom Dick had explained.

"Don't get rattled!" called Ned. "We'll fix you all right in a moment. Broken any bones?"

"No, I reckon not. Can't find that I have; say, I went down kinder sudden, didn't I? Gee whiz! The bottom dropped out of the blame thing all at once."

"I tell you what it is, Ned," said Dick, "Cal Remington knew about that cave. He opened it be-

fore us, and filled up the opening—that's what it all means."

Perhaps it was so, and perhaps it wasn't. As the boys peered down into the hole their eyes become accustomed to the darkness, and they could see Jukes standing about ten feet below them.

"It's a curious place down here," he said, slowly.

"Say, boss, I believe this is a big thing."

"Do you see gold?" questioned Ned.

"Do I see it? I don't see nothing else. This is a pocket as is a pocket—there's nuggets everywhere I look; I reckon you'd better come down here first before you haul me out."

In a few moments the Unknown was back with the lantern and rope.

"I'm going down," declared Ned.

"No, sir!" cried the Unknown. "Not with that man alone there," he added, in a whisper. "Let me go!"

"Nonsense! As though he would dare interfere with me! I'm going right now."

There was no use arguing with Ned once his mind was made up.

So they tied the rope under his arms, and Dick and the Unknown lowered him down.

The lantern was lowered after him.

"Go on, Dick!" said the Unknown. "Don't leave him alone with that man."

Before Dick could get the rope up Ned called out:

"We've struck it! We've struck it! There must be a million in sight right here!"

The startling announcement sent Dick down into the hole in a hurry.

"Look and see!" cried Ned. "Isn't this wonderful. Zed, I wish you were here, too!"

"I could jump down in a jiffy, but who'd pull you fellows up again?" cried the Unknown, bending over the hole.

But he could see without going down.

The ground at the bottom of that wonderful pocket was literally strewn with nuggets.

They were not very large ones, but the quantity in sight was enormous.

There could be no doubt that Young Klondike and his party had made the greatest strike on record on El Dorado Creek—indeed, there had been nothing to equal it in the entire Klondike district.

We say this emphatically, for it is the truth. But we don't want any of our readers to think for an instant that they have only to go to the Klondike and do likewise.

The luck of Ned Golden's party was the luck of a lifetime, but it was none the less wonderful for all that.

"Call Edith! She must see this before a nugget is raised!" shouted Ned.

The Unknown threw up his rifle and fired two shots.

This brought Edith and Mrs. Colvin over to the trench after a little.

While they were waiting for them Ned and Dick,

assisted by Jukes, who was not injured at all, explored the whole cave.

It was of no great extent, nor did it need to be to make it certain that the fortune of our little company was insured.

The floor of the cave was so thick with nuggets that it was impossible to walk without stepping on them.

Dick called for a shovel and pick and Jukes dug down a little way, but did not come to the end of the deposit.

It was such a pocket as has seldom been found in any part of the world.

There was no more digging done that day, but work went right on, nevertheless.

Ned came out of the cave and lowered Edith and the Unknown down, that they might have a look.

Then all came up and went to dinner, for Mrs. Colvin had roasted four ducks—Edith's shooting—and the good woman declared that big strike or no big strike she would not see them spoiled.

"We want to decide on our course at once," said the Unknown, "and this man, Jukes, must not know what it is to be."

"We can't handle that gold without help, that's one thing sure," said Ned.

"Indeed we can't. We've got to get to Dawson as quick as we can."

"I say, let's raise all the boat will carry, and then cover the hole and fill up the trench."

"And take Jukes with us?" said the Unknown.

"It's the only safe way, I suppose."

"Suppose we consider that settled."

"I agree," said Dick.

"Same here," said Edith.

"It's the best way, because it's the only way," declared the Unknown; "but let me talk to Jukes."

"Go ahead," said Ned. "Speak to him fair, though. I want to do what's right. This man really made the strike, and he's entitled to his share if he's straight."

"Which he ain't—take my word for it. Jukes! Hey, Jukes! Come here!"

Mr. Jeremiah Jukes was sitting on a rock, smoking.

He knew that he was not wanted near the camp and he had sense enough to keep away.

Now he arose and came slouching up, with a stolid look on his face, which almost seemed to indicate that he did not appreciate the magnitude of his wonderful find.

"Neighbor," said the Unknown, "this strike is a big thing; we recognize that you made it, although of course, we should have struck that hole sooner or later ourselves."

"Dunno whether you would or not," growled Jukes.

"There's no doubt that we would; but still, we want to do the right thing by you, and——"

"What do you call the right thing?"

"I want to be liberal," broke in Ned, but the Unknown held up his hand.

"Leave it to me! Leave it to me!" he said. "What do you think is right, Mr. Jukes? I want your views first."

"Half!" said the man, impudently. "I want half!"

"Well, you won't get it. Just as I supposed! You entirely overestimate your service. We'll give you ten per cent. as long as you remain with us, and work for our interest, and that's more than you ought to have; boys, does that seem right to you?"

"I'm perfectly satisfied," said Ned.

"So am I," added Dick.

"Well, I hain't," growled Jukes.

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Nothing."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Mean just what I say, I'll stay here and work for you and take my ten per cent., but I hain't satisfied. I tell you that flat."

Ned was about to speak, but again the Unknown interfered.

"Those are our terms," he said, sternly. "If they don't satisfy you why travel on and do your worst. I've said my last word."

Mr. Jukes growled out an unintelligible reply and walked away.

"You're too rough with him," said Ned. "I'd have made him a better offer than that."

"Now, now! None of that, Young Klondike! I know my man."

"I don't believe you do; you've been looking for your man ever since I knew you and you don't find him. I don't believe you know this man, either; you've made an enemy where you might have made a friend."

Ned was vexed, and he showed it, but the Unknown's good humor was not to be disturbed.

"Now, now, none of that!" he repeated. "Ye gods and little fishes! Was I born yesterday? No, siree! That man's a spy!"

"Get to work, get to work!" cried Dick. "There's no use quarreling. The junior partner of Golden & Luckey says let the firm abide by the decision of the Unknown."

"And the senior agrees," said Ned. "There's my hand on it, Zed. You've been a good friend to us, and after all you may be right."

"So sure that I'm right that I shall keep a closer watch than ever, dear boy, but we won't talk any more about it now. Dick's remedy for a disagreement is the correct one. To work, to work!"

And they worked hard the rest of the afternoon.

Pleasant work it was, too.

Hoisting golden nuggets out of a hold by the bucket full can't be beaten. It is making money with a vengeance.

By three o'clock they had taken out twice as much gold as they could possibly carry in the boat.

Jukes worked with them pleasantly enough.

He made no allusion to their disagreement; in fact,

he just went ahead as though nothing disagreeable had occurred.

"No use going any further!" cried Ned, at last. "We want to cover up now."

"What's that for?" demanded Jukes. "Hain't you going to stay here and work the claim?"

"We'll decide that later," replied Ned, quietly. "Let's get that big stone over here and cover the hole."

"But I thought this was to be a steady job for me?"

"So it is. Your pay will go on right along."

"Be you going away?"

"Don't ask me any more questions, for I shan't answer them. Will you give me a hand with the stone?"

Jukes growled out an assent, and the stone was put in place.

Then he and Ned started in to fill up the trench.

Meanwhile, Dick and the Unknown, assisted by Edith, carried the gold down to the shore.

They had found a hiding-place here between two large rocks; it was all arranged that it should be temporarily deposited there, while Ned left Jukes busy at the hole.

"Whatever he's going to do, he'll do to-night," the Unknown had declared. "We'll rest quiet till morning, and then if he's still with us, we'll make our start."

It was supper time before the trench was filled.

Of course it was impossible to hide the traces of their work, but it seemed better so than to leave the mouth of the cave exposed.

"Where's the gold?" demanded Jukes sullenly, as he and Ned came down to the camp, where Mrs. Colvin had supper spread upon a snow-white table cloth laid on the ground.

"Gone," said the Unknown, shortly.

"Gone where?"

"Gone away."

"But there's been no one here to take it away—what do you mean?"

"What do you mean by prying into our business? Eat your supper and don't ask questions, for you'll get no answer here."

Perhaps it was a mistake for the Unknown to take the man up so short.

Ned thought so, but it did not work the way he supposed it would.

Instead of getting angry, Jukes only grinned and became very lively and talkative.

He sat around smoking on the rocks after the meal was over, for half an hour or so, and then rolling himself up in his blankets, laid down and went to sleep in the same place where he had slept the night before.

Of course it was still broad daylight and the boys did not feel a bit like turning in.

Ned got out his banjo and commenced to play. Edith sang her usual sweet songs, and they had one of their old time jolly evenings.

Of course there was lots of talk about the big strike, too, and all this time Jukes never moved.

"I'm sure you're wrong, Zed," declared Dick. "That man is going to stay right by us. 'Twouldn't pay him to do anything else. Even allowing he only gets his ten per cent., his fortune is made."

"He'll get more than that if he's straight," declared Ned; "but it's time for us to go to sleep now, if we are to be in shape for our journey to-morrow. Who's to go first on the watch?"

"Nobody," said the Unknown. "We're all going to turn in to-night."

"Another of your surprises," said Dick. "What do you mean by that?"

"Strikes me that this is the very night of all others, that one of us ought to remain on guard," said Edith.

"Show your hand, Zed," laughed Ned. "We want to be guided by your experience. Let us know just what you mean."

"That's just it," said the Unknown. "If you had been through my experience, you'd understand. What I'm driving at is to give Jukes a chance to show his hand. Do you suppose I shall sleep? Not much! My watch eye never sleeps. If I pace up and down with a gun there may be trouble, but if I lie down to watch he'll make his move and then we'll know just where we are at."

"Why, the man is sound asleep," declared Edith. "I don't believe he has any more idea of making a move than nothing at all."

"Now, Edith, my dear girl, I don't want to contradict you, but allow me to tell you that the man is wide awake. If he was near enough to hear us, he would be listening to every word we say. We've made a big strike. Young Klondike & Co. have a million in their grasp, and by the Jumping Jeremiah, they mean to keep a tight hold on it. Good-night. I'm going to bed."

Thus saying, the Unknown rolled himself up in his blankets, and lay down on the rocks.

Edith and Mrs. Colvin went inside the brush shelter, and Ned and Dick followed the example of the Unknown.

A little while after that the sun went down and a few stars came out.

All the night there was going to be would soon pass.

And silence reigned in the little camp on the banks of El Dorado creek.

CHAPTER XI.

CAPTURED BY THE ENEMY.

"YOUNG KLONDIKE! Young Klondike! Wake up! Wake up!"

Ned dreamed that he heard the cry in his sleep.

He knew that he was asleep and dreaming, and yet somehow he could not shake off the influence until the sharp report of a rifle suddenly brought him to his feet.

Dick was just scrambling up, too, and Edith came hurrying out from behind the bush.

"What in the world is the matter, Ned?" she cried.

"After him! He's got the boat!" yelled the Unknown, whom they could see running up the hill which overlooked the shore. "Dick! Dick! come with me! Bring your rifle! We've got all we can do here!"

At the same instant a diabolical yell was heard in the distance.

The Unknown disappeared over the brow of the hill.

"That's Cal Remington!" cried Ned. "Run, Dick! Don't let Zed hurt him! I'll look after the boat."

Mr. Jeremiah Jukes had vanished.

At first glance Ned saw that, and he understood in part, at least, what he had to do.

Seizing his rifle he ran down toward the shore to the place where the boat had been left.

"You don't go without me, Ned!" cried Edith.

She had her rifle already, and without losing an instant the brave girl followed Ned, but where Dick and the Unknown had gone they could only guess, for they had disappeared over the brow of the hill, and neither the strange cry nor the report of the detective's rifle were heard again.

But Ned felt that they were perfectly well able to take care of themselves, and he dismissed them from his thoughts once he and Edith got in sight of the shore.

It could hardly be otherwise.

What they saw showed them both how correct the Unknown had been in his estimate of the character of Mr. Jeremiah Jukes.

Out in the middle of the creek they saw the miner in the boat, pulling up the creek for all he was worth.

Ned flung up his rifle.

"Don't!" said Edith. "Don't let's have his life on our conscience, Ned. I can stop him without that."

"He must be stopped, Edith. The Unknown was right. He is a spy! He's going up to Dinzey's camp to tell what we have struck."

Edith fired—that was her answer.

The shot entered the water just short of the boat.

"Burn you! Take that!" yelled Jukes.

He had shipped his oars and picking up his rifle, fired twice in rapid succession.

It was a waste of powder.

Ned and Edith dropped flat and the bullets went whistling over their heads.

The instant he dropped his rifle and took up the oars again, Edith was on her feet.

She fired twice.

Both shots went through the side of the boat, exactly as she intended they should.

"That cuts him off!" she cried. "He's got to take to the water now! Run, Ned! You can get the boat as it comes down!"

It was a great scheme, this of Edith's. Certainly it spoiled the plans of Mr. Jeremiah Jukes most effectually.

The boat pierced now with three holes, began to fill and sink.

Jukes stopped rowing and tried to bail, using very strong language all the while.

But this did not help matters.

The boat was sinking fast.

Ned, who had run down to the shore, threw off his coat, hat and shoes.

It was his work to get the sinking boat and bring it ashore.

And unless he was interfered with he was well able to do it, for there was no better swimmer than Ned Golden in Alaska.

This Edith knew and counted on.

"Don't let it pass you, Ned," she cried. "I'll look out for Jukes."

Ned made a dive off the rocks and struck out for the boat.

It was time if he meant to get it.

Jukes had already abandoned it.

Seeing the impossibility of keeping it afloat, he jumped overboard and started to swim for the point of land which lay just ahead.

"Head him off, Edith! Don't let him get away from you!" shouted Ned. "Keep him covered till I come!"

As he thus shouted Ned dove head under.

He had located the boat and made due allowance for the force of the current.

A few strokes would bring him to it, he felt sure, and if he could get hold of the rope which was attached to the bow-ring he felt equally certain that he would have no trouble in bringing it ashore.

It was well planned—and it worked well.

The sun was already up again now, and Ned had no difficulty in shaping his course.

In a moment he was up, too, and he brought the rope with him.

Before he had time to look around he heard a rifle shot.

"Drop that gun, girl, or we'll do you!" someone shouted, and another shot was fired, the ball whizzing past Ned in the creek.

There, just coming round the point, were two boats.

In the foremost was one-eyed Budd Dinzey, the mild man and the same old gang.

In the other were more of the same sort.

Nor was this all.

Four or five other roughly dressed fellows, armed with rifles, had surrounded Edith on the shore.

The poor girl was already a prisoner.

It was one of her captors who was firing at Ned.

"Kill the feller in the water! Kill him! He's Young Klondike! He's the boss!" Jukes shouted out.

Ned ducked down again.

The water was icy cold, and he was chilled from head to foot.

His left leg was already cramped, and in fact, in his present condition Ned, if he had been anything but

the good swimmer he was, would surely have been drowned.

"If I can get back to my rifle I may have some chance yet," he thought, so he just set his teeth and swam on under water, resolved to fight it out to the last.

Meanwhile, Mr. Jeremiah Jukes, who was anything but a good swimmer, found himself in much the same situation as Ned.

Cramp had seized him.

"Help me, Budd! I'm a-drowning!" he yelled, suddenly. "Gee whiz! Don't let me go! Young Klondike has made a million-dollar strike and I know where it is."

"Hold up! We'll be there in a minute!" shouted Budd. "You fellers on shore look out for the boy when he comes up again!"

On flew the boats, the men pulling for all they were worth, and the strong current of El Dorado creek helping them along.

Jukes, still yelling for help, kept himself up the best he could.

As for the swamped boat, it was already grounded, and its progress stopped by a big rock.

Just as Dinzey's boat came up with Jukes, Ned, unable to keep under the water any longer, rose to the surface.

By an unlucky coincidence, he came up right alongside of Jukes.

"Shoot him, Ham! Shoot Young Klondike! There he is!" yelled Jukes, spitefully.

His cramp had left him now, and he was swimming again. Stupid fool that he was, he swam toward Ned.

That move took him to his death.

The man on the shore fired.

Jukes gave a wild yell, flung up his hands, and sank.

The bullet from Ham's rifle had taken him in the heart, and Ned had escaped only to be captured by Budd Dinzey and his crowd a second later.

"Surrender, Young Klondike!" yelled Dinzey, covering him with a revolver.

Then he burst out with a torrent of abuse against Ham, for what he had done.

It was all up with Jukes.

His body never even rose to the surface, but was swept away down the creek.

A moment later, and they were all ashore.

Edith and Ned were prisoners in the hands of as tough a gang as was to be found anywhere in the Klondike country.

It certainly was a bad outlook, and in his heart Ned blamed the Unknown.

"This is what comes of his watching," he thought. "Oh, if I had never listened to him. I was mad to sleep as I did."

There was a good deal of confusion at first.

Efforts were being made to get at Jukes.

Evidently these men were all his friends.

Several of them turned on Ham.

Shots were fired.

It looked like a free fight, and there would have

been lives lost undoubtedly, if Budd Dinzey had not interfered.

"Quit it, boys! Quit it!" he yelled. "This cuts no ice! Of course Ham didn't mean to kill Jerry."

Ham protested that he didn't, and at last things quieted down.

All this time Ned and Edith were held close prisoners.

It was not until Dinzey had succeeded in restoring order, that the toughs turned their attention to them.

"So, Young Klondike. You've earned your life," he said, sneeringly, as he came up to Ned.

"I'm alive—that's sure," replied Ned, as he stood bravely up before them. "Gentlemen, I ask for nothing for myself, but for this young lady and her friend at our camp—"

"Don't bother your head! We'll take care of the ladies!" broke in Dinzey. "Here's our offer! You are all in our power! Old Plug Hat and your friend have been captured, too! You've made a big strike, Young Klondike! Tell us where it is and we'll spare your lives; refuse, and Judge Lynch will decide what is to be done with you all, ladies included, and up here on El Dorado Creek the judge's decision always goes one way!"

CHAPTER XII.

AT THE MERCY OF THE GANG.

NED was in despair.

If it had not been for Edith, he would have scouted the idea of revealing the secret of the cave.

But Ned could not make up his mind to risk Edith's life for gold, no matter how large the amount.

Then there was Dick and the Unknown to be considered.

If it was true that they were prisoners, he must also think of them.

"Are you going to tell, Young Klondike?" asked Budd Dinzey, leering at Ned with his good eye. "This is the last call. I want to settle this business right up."

"No, he ain't going to tell!" said Edith, decidedly. "Don't you think it! We are game for Judge Lynch, if it must be so, but we are not to be forced into anything—understand that."

"Nobody spoke to you, young woman," said Dinzey, in his most surly fashion. "It will be time enough for you to offer your remarks when someone does."

But Ned had caught his cue from Edith. The look she gave him was enough.

It said as plainly as if words had been spoken; "hold out till the last gasp, Ned, and don't let him scare you on my account."

"Come, come! What's your decision, Young Klondike?" demanded Dinzey. "Shall Judge Lynch try you, or will you tell what you've struck on our claim?"

"They don't know about the big strike at all," thought Ned. "I might have guessed it. Jukes had no time to report."

He immediately shifted his tactics, saying:

"I'm sure I don't know what you expect me to tell you?"

"Come now, come now! None of that! What have you struck here?"

"A tough gang."

"None of your impudence."

"You asked me, I answered."

"'Twon't do."

"What did you kill your spy for? He would have reported."

"And didn't he report? Didn't you hear him holler that you'd struck a million just before he was shot?"

Ned caught his breath. He had forgotten that, but the recollection gave him another idea.

"Very good. Admitting it's so, if you kill me, you'll never find out where we struck it—that's all."

"He's right there, Budd," said the mild man. "We've looked all over, and can't make out where they've been digging."

"Look more, then! Bring up the other prisoners—perhaps we can make them tell. Look alive! Get a move on you—do something! This business must be brought to an end!"

Budd Dinzey was getting wild.

Meanwhile, Ned's hands had been tied behind him. Edith was closely guarded, but not tied.

Dinzey and the gang led them over the ridge to the camp.

Here Mrs. Colvin was captured.

The good woman was scared out of her wits, and made such a clatter that Dinzey had her tied up and gagged.

He tried to make her tell where the digging had been done, but Edith gave her a look, and in spite of her fright, Mrs. Colvin would reveal nothing.

"Tie up Young Klondike and the girl, too," cried Dinzey. "We'll all go on the hunt for their diggings. Where in thunder is Ham? Why don't he come back with the other two?"

Ham and four men had started off over the hill.

Ned and Edith fully expected to see them return with Dick and the Unknown.

They did not come, however, but Dinzey and his crowd went off over the hills a few moments later, leaving one man to guard the prisoners.

After a little while shouts were heard.

"We've struck it! We've struck it!" Dinzey's voice could be heard calling. "This way, boys! Here's the place!"

Ned and Edith were tied back to back against a tree and could not see each other, but Ned knew that Edith was as deep in despair as himself, when she whispered:

"I'm afraid it's all up with us, Ned. They'll kill us if they find the gold."

Mining on the Klondike has its ups and downs like any other business.

Ned's luck was very much down just now, and he could only comfort himself by thinking that it was always darkest just before day.

There was much consolation in that homely proverb, but for the moment we shall leave Ned to make the most of it and return to Dick, when he went bounding up the hill to join the Unknown.

Dick got to the top of the hill just in time to hear that strange cry.

Before he could pronounce Cal Remington's name—for, of course, the thought that it must proceed from the madman crossed his mind—the detective began firing at a little clump of bushes on the other side of the hollow.

"They are there, Dick!" he cried. "I saw them. Jukes has betrayed us! We must wipe them off the earth if we expect to hold our claim."

"It's Remington," said Dick. "You don't want to shoot him! Be careful what you are doing, Zed."

"No, it ain't Remington, neither. I heard him, too! I knew from your description who it must be, but there were four men coming down toward the camp, and I chased them over this hill."

"That so?"

"Yes, sir! I was watching, and don't your forget it. They gave a signal, and Jukes was up in a minute, but when he saw me up, too, he ran for the boat."

"And you followed these four men?"

"Your bet! When they saw me with my rifle, they ran like blazes. Oh, if you fellows had only been quicker! But no matter. Ned and Edith will attend to Jukes, and we must look after these pals of his. They are only a lot of cowards, anyhow; we'll be able to hunt them off all right enough."

Now, these remarks will show that for once the Unknown had not displayed his usual shrewdness.

He had entirely misunderstood the situation.

He thought he was leaving the easier task to Ned and taking all the danger upon himself.

How utterly mistaken he was in this the reader already knows.

And the Unknown was to discover his blunder before many minutes had passed.

With Dick at his side, he waited.

All was still in the hollow and among the bushes on the other slope.

"We'll just run over there and make sure they are gone, Dick," said the detective; "then we'll get back to Ned in a hurry. I haven't the least doubt that he'll manage to lead off Jukes."

A shot was heard.

It was the time when Edith began firing at the boat.

"They'll fix 'em!" cried the Unknown. "Come on, Dick!"

They ran down into the hollow and made for the bushes.

There was no trace of the enemy, and the Unknown

felt perfectly secure, when all at once six men sprang out from the bushes.

Before Dick and the detective could make a move they were surrounded.

A few moments later the six men hurried back over the hill to join Budd Dinzey and his party.

Dick and the Unknown were left among the bushes; their rifles and revolvers were gone, and they were bound hand and foot.

"Fool! Ass! Idiot! That's what I am!" groaned the Unknown. "It's all my doings, Dick Luckey! It was I who led you into this trap!"

But there was no use in talking about it.

All the talk in the world would not help them now.

Indeed, Dick and the detective had every reason to congratulate themselves, that they had not been killed outright.

And this is the reason why they did not come to the assistance of Ned and Edith.

Considering his claim to be a detective, the Unknown had made a terrible mistake.

Like Young Klondike and the ladies, they were at the mercy of the gang.

CHAPTER XIII.

"WE'LL FIGHT THEM TO THE LAST."

"EDITH! Oh, Edith!"

"I hear—what is it, Ned?"

"We're alone at last!"

"Yes; but what can we do?"

"We must do something—now is our time!"

"I'm ready for anything, but I'm tied so tight that I can't make a move."

This was also Ned's situation.

Back to back they stood with the little tree between them.

The guard, attracted by Budd Dinzey's shout, had run off over the hill.

"They've found the diggings, Edith. It's all up with our chances here."

"It looks so, but don't despair, Ned. We are alive, and that's something. I'm not ready to give up yet."

"By gracious, neither am I, Edith! I've struck something now."

"What do you mean?"

"Can't you feel?"

"I feel your fingers, Ned. Can you do anything? Oh, if you only could!"

It seemed a forlorn hope to Edith but not to Ned, for by twisting his hands around in the loops his fingers had come in contact with the knot which tied Edith's hands to the tree.

Ned's hands were tied together at the wrists, which left his fingers free.

He could work at the knot without difficulty, but of course it all had to be done by feeling.

Ned went right at it.

"I'm getting it loose, Edith," he whispered, at length. "I'm certainly getting it loose!"

"Oh, Ned! If you only could! We might do so much if we were free!"

"Hush! You'll be free in a minute now, and then you can help me."

"Stop! They are coming! It is too late!"

It looked so for the moment.

Dinzey and several others came running over the hill.

"Cover the knot with your hands—don't move, Edith," whispered Ned.

They were after the picks and shovels to begin in the trench.

"Ha! Ha! Young Klondike! We've struck your work!" called the one-eyed man, sneeringly. "Thought you'd fill it up, eh? What's down there? You may as well tell, for we are bound to know."

"You'll find out when you get there," answered Ned, coolly.

He little dreamed how strangely this prediction was destined to be fulfilled.

"Gold! That's what's there!" cried Dinzey. "Say, Young Klondike, you made a big mistake in coming to El Dorado; let me tell you what the end is going to be. We shall shoot you and your friends just as soon—hello, Ham! Where are them fellers? We've struck Young Klondike's million dollar diggings all right. Why didn't you bring 'em over as I told you? We want to do the whole of 'em up right now."

"Bring over nothing—give us a chance to speak, can't yer?" growled Ham, who now came hurrying up. "Old Plug Hat and the boy has given us the slip. They are gone, dogon 'em! Where, we don't know!"

Dinzey gave a roar of rage.

The talk which followed is of little consequence.

It amounted to just this much: Ham and his companions had gone back to the bushes when they left Dick and the Unknown prisoners, but they were no longer there.

"Let 'em go!" growled Dinzey, at last. "If they show up we'll shoot 'em—that's all! Come on, Ham! We've struck the gold!"

They then went for tools and returned with them over the hills.

Scarcely were their backs turned when Ned was at work on the knots again.

"I've done it, Edith!" he breathed at last.

Edith sprang away from the tree.

"I've got a knife in my inside pocket—get it out and cut me loose!" whispered Ned.

Edith was in the act of doing this, when a slight sound among the rocks behind them brought her around in a hurry.

"Dick! Dick!" breathed Ned, joyfully.

It was Dick and the Unknown who had suddenly risen up among the rocks.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah! Kick me! Kick me!"

whispered the detective. "This is all my fault, Ned, but I don't give up! Dick got those little hands of his out of the cords, and that's the way we give them the slip. I see Edith has done the same thing for you."

"Wrong! Ned did it for me," said Edith. "We are all free now but Mrs. Colvin, and she soon will be. Zed, tell us what to do?"

"Attend to Mrs. Colvin first. You'll find it decided before you get back."

Away flew Edith to rescue her friend.

"We'll fight them to the last," said Ned, "but I'm for getting one of their boats and making off now. We'll run down to Barney McGraw's, on the Klondike, and pick up our buried gold on the way. Money will buy anything, and it will buy us help to drive these scoundrels off our claim."

"A good scheme, if I didn't know a better one," replied the Unknown.

"What do you mean?" asked Ned. "Speak quick! They may be back here any moment—we haven't an instant to lose!"

"Ned, I'm no fool, if I am sometimes light in my way of speaking. I know something that you don't know."

"What?"

"Will you leave all this to me?"

"Zed, are you sure of your ground? Remember you were on the watch when all this happened. I—"

"Now don't go to blaming me, Young Klondike. Plenty of time for that later. Will you, or won't you?"

"I will, of course, if—"

"No ifs about it! Get Edith and Mrs. Colvin down on to the shore under the bluff right where the ledge juts out—I'll be with you in two shakes."

"Where are you going?"

But the Unknown was already gone.

Crouching down he ran like lightning up the hill and disappeared over the ridge.

"He'll be seen and shot as sure as fate!" gasped Ned. "He's crazy! Dick, why don't you speak?"

"Leave it all to him, Ned! He's told me part of his plan. Take my advice and do just as he says."

"That's all I want to hear," replied Ned.

Just then Edith came out of the brush shelter, with fat Mrs. Colvin waddling after her.

Ned held up his finger for silence, and led the way down on the shore under the bluff, where they waited with the greatest impatience for the Unknown.

In a few moments they heard his footsteps on the sand.

"Here I am!" he exclaimed, as he came around the point of rocks. "Boys, what do you think of this?"

"Our rifles!" cried Ned, joyfully.

"Three of them and don't you forget it! I crawled down the hill and came within a hundred feet of them and they never tumbled! They are too busy opening the trench! Edith, my dear, I didn't get yours, but

there's no worse shot on the Klondike than I am, so you may use mine."

"Look! Look there!" cried Mrs. Colvin, suddenly pointing down the creek.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah! Half a dozen boats coming, and all loaded down with men!" gasped the Unknown.

"More enemies!" said Dick.

"Perhaps they are friends," added Ned. "We'll wait and see."

"We'll wait for nothing," broke out the Unknown. "Follow me, Young Klondike, and all the rest of you. Even Mrs. Colvin goes part way, but not very far."

"Where in the world are you going?" cried Ned; "wouldn't it be better to wait and see who these people are?"

"Not on your life! The game is in our hands, and we'll fight it out to the last!"

CHAPTER XIV.

A MADMAN'S REVENGE.

As the Unknown spoke these words, he made a sudden spring in between two big rocks which overhung the bank of El Dorado Creek and disappeared.

"What in thunder is this?" cried Ned. "Another cave?"

"Follow him," said Dick. "He's told me this much—it's all right."

"Come on! Come on!" called the voice of the Unknown from behind the rocks.

Dick led the way, and the others lost no time in following.

The moment they passed between the big rocks all exclaimed in surprise.

They found the Unknown standing at the mouth of a natural tunnel extending back under the hills.

It was only a few feet wide, but so high that they could not see the rocks above in the darkness.

Ned saw at a glance that it ran in the direction of the golden cave.

"There! This is my find!" cried the Unknown. "Night before last, while you all slept, I drifted down here and made this discovery, and there is more of it, Young Klondike. Of course I ought to have told you, but I was keeping it for a surprise."

"It leads into the golden cave?" cried Ned.

"Well, I think so—but I am not sure. I followed it a long way, but I didn't come to the end. I've been thinking it all over since, and I'm just about as certain as any one can be, that it will take us to the cave. Still, don't let me encourage you. I don't actually know."

"If it does we are all right!" cried Ned. "With our rifles we can defend the cave against a thousand men. Oh, if we only had a lantern now."

"Which we have, dear boy! Ye gods and little

fishes! Do you think I'm a fool? Oh, no! Not much! I left my lantern behind me and here it is."

It was a lucky bit of forethought on the part of the Unknown.

In a moment they had all the light they needed.

"Mrs. Colvin, you'll stay here alone and watch those boats," said the detective. "Now, don't say no! If there is the least danger hurry after us. Here's my match box, it will help you light your way. Give one of your screams as soon as you are well in the cave, and we shall be sure to hear you, and one of us will come to your aid."

Probably Mrs. Colvin would rather have done anything else than this, but it is only due to her to say that she raised no objection.

The Unknown then took up his lantern and led the way into the cave.

The others followed him silently in single file.

In spite of many windings, the cave maintained the same general direction.

"We are getting there, that's sure!" exclaimed Dick.

"I'm positive of it," replied Ned. "You still think so, Zed?"

"If I didn't, I wouldn't be here," answered the detective, shortly; "but say, boys, there's been someone in here ahead of us. That's what's worrying me just about now."

"What do you see—what do you mean?" asked Ned and Dick in a breath.

"It's the footprints on the sand," said Edith, quietly. "I saw them some time back. I've been waiting for Zed to speak."

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, Edith, you'd make a good detective!" cried the Unknown. "I wouldn't wonder a bit if my man had been in here."

"Quit your nonsense! This is too serious a matter!" cried Ned. "Where are your footprints?"

"There you are!" said the Unknown, pointing down.

They were so faint that it was a matter of wonder that Edith should have observed them.

"Too big for my foot," said the detective. "Now then, who made them? Answer to come later. Look sharp, boys! This is as far as I went."

"And as far as any one can go, I'm thinking," said Dick, dismally.

They had come up against a wall of rock, but the Unknown pointed to a narrow opening up on the side of the wall.

"I'm going through there, boys!" he cried. "It's my belief that right beyond these rocks lies the golden cave."

It was not so close as that, but the Unknown was not far out of the way.

The passage through the rock was a hundred yards long at least, and so low that they were forced to go through it on their hands and knees.

All of a sudden, Ned heard a noise overhead. Someone was striking the rocks with a pick.

"Dogon it! This is bed rock!" a voice shouted. "Have we been fooled after all?"

"The cave! The cave!" breathed the Unknown. "Here we are!"

He went scrambling down to a lower level.

One glance showed them that he was right.

There lay the golden nuggets scattered about in every direction.

They could hear the voices of Budd Dinzey's gang with perfect distinctness overhead.

"Put out the light!" breathed Ned. "They'll strike the hole in a minute more!"

"Then we shoot," said the Unknown. "Edith, we depend on you—mustn't hold back now."

"We'll defend our own," replied Edith. "No one comes down into this cave if I can help it, be sure of that."

She was put to the test an instant later.

Suddenly there was a great shout above, and daylight burst in upon them.

"A cave! A cave!" yelled Dinzey. "This is it, boys! This is Cal Remington's wonderful discovery. You remember the yarn he gave us? You ought to. We trumped up a charge of murder against him, and turned him over to Judge Lynch, thinking we knew all, but we were too previous; straight goods, now, though! We've found Cal's cave at last, and I'm the first man down."

A pair of legs darkened the mouth of the cave then. Instantly Edith fired.

There was an awful yell and the legs went up again quicker than they came down.

Ned fired through the opening.

So did Dick.

"Gee whiz! There's someone down there! I'm shot!" they heard Dinzey shout, and then all in an instant our friends were startled by seeing a man spring out of the shadows at the other end of the cave.

It was Cal Remington.

His long hair hung loosely about his shoulders. Bare-headed and bare-footed, with the light of madness gleaming in his eyes, he presented a striking picture.

"Back! Back by the way you came!" he cried. "There's twenty pounds of dynamite in this hole and I've lighted the fuse! Back! Back, or you are lost! Leave those scoundrels to me! Ha! Ha! Ha! This is the madman's revenge!"

He sprang away before any one could answer.

Distinctly they could hear the sputtering fuse in the other end of the cave.

"Fly for your lives!" gasped the Unknown. "That fellow means business! Go! Go!"

It would be hard to describe just how they got through the narrow passage into the tunnel, but they did.

Scarcely had they gained it when a deafening explosion burst behind them.

It threw Ned against Dick, almost taking them off

their feet, and Edith tumbled into the arms of the Unknown.

On they ran, never heeding the darkness.

Then they heard Mrs. Colvin scream:

"This way! This way! Friends! Friends!"

They thought the good woman had taken leave of her senses until they came out upon the shore, and found themselves in the midst of a crowd of sturdy miners, headed by their old friend, Barney McGraw.

"Hello, Young Klondike!" he cried. "What's all this? We're up El Dorado looking for a gang of thieves and claim jumpers, led by one Budd Dinzey. This good woman tells me they are here. Have you been blowing them up, or what?"

The "what" Ned speedily told.

There were forty men in Barney's party, and they no sooner grasped the situation than they rushed up the hill, led by Ned, and gave chase to the scoundrels, who were already on the run.

Probably the shots frightened them off before the explosion came, for not one was found dead near where the trench had been.

Young Klondike and his friends chased them up the creek taking to the boats to do it, and after a run of several hours on the creek and on the shore, Budd Dinzey's gang was captured.

And the end?

Well, justice is swift and sure in the Klondike country, and these men were murderers and thieves.

The leaders were shot and their bodies hastily buried. The rest were warned out of the country; where they went to nobody ever knew.

This effectually disposed of all difficulty about the claim, and as from that time on all was smooth sailing with Ned Golden and his friends, we may as well bring our story to a close.

Returning to the trench Ned, with the help of Barney McGraw, started in to look for the remains of Cal Remington.

A fearful scene of destruction met their gaze as they came down over the hill.

For a hundred feet either way, the ground and rocks had all been torn up and lay in a confused mass.

Of course, none of Dinzey's party could have been there when the explosion came.

Doubtless they heard the madman's shout, and made their escape, only to be captured by the "Law and Order League," as Barney's party was called.

Remington's remains were discovered at the end of three days.

Ned saw them decently buried, and then started for Dawson City with Barney McGraw, with three boats loaded with nuggets.

On the way they stopped to dig up the gold near the stranded hut.

Arrived at Dawson, Ned banked over three hundred thousand dollars, and soon Young Klondike's great discovery was in everybody's mouth.

Next day Ned gave five thousand dollars to the hospital, and felt himself the actual owner of Cal Remington's claim.

But this was only the beginning.

Dick, Edith and the Unknown had been left behind to work the cave.

All of Barney McGraw's men who were willing to work were engaged at twenty-five dollars a day.

When Ned returned with Barney, who abandoned his own claim temporarily, he had the register's certificate showing Golden & Luckey to be the owners of the new diggings on El Dorado Creek.

He found that the cave was now cleared, and Dick was getting nuggets out by the bucketful.

Just one month later, Ned went down to Dawson City again.

"How much this time, Young Klondike?" asked the cashier of the branch bank of British North America, as Ned presented himself at the little window.

"I leave it for you to say, Mr. Runtree," replied Ned. "I've made no attempt to weigh it; it's coming up in a cart."

"Coming in a cart! Good Heavens! Do you have to carry your gold in a cart!" cried the cashier.

"Whoa, January! Here we are! Ye gods and little fishes, safe at the bank at last!" exclaimed a voice outside, as a cart drawn by two horses rounded up at the door of the bank.

For the Unknown was the driver, and he struck

his plug hat against the door jamb, and knocked it over his eyes when he came staggering in with the first box of gold on his back.

Then they weighed it, and Ned went out with the bank's certificate in his pocket.

"How much, dear boy?" asked the Unknown when they were outside.

Ned showed the certificate.

Immediately the Unknown pulled off his plug hat and flung it into the air, deftly catching it on his head as it came down.

"Young Klondike's first million!" he cried. "Ye gods and little fishes! We've got there at last! This is almost as good as getting my man!"

Astounding as it may seem, Golden & Luckey had actually banked over a million dollars in gold.

Yes, Young Klondike had made his first million, and it made him friends and it made him enemies—money always does that.

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[THE END.]

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